

THE PATRIARCHS

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THE PATRIARCHS



Introduction

"History as a weapon is an abuse of history. The high purpose of history is not the presentation of self or the vindication of identity but the recognition of complexity and the search of knowledge". These were the words of

Arthur M. Schlesinger ¹ on the subject. This is how it should be, but it is not how it usually is.

One should remember George Orwell's '1984' with Big Brother manipulating past history at will, and claiming that whoever controls the present controls the past too. But, then, it was only fiction. The execution of that theory was left to the Soviets, luckily without the success of Big Brother. One recalls the replacing the pages of the Soviet Encyclopedia in the 30's and 40's of the last century, and the famous picture of the members of the first Politbureau, which was retouched so many times that only Lenin and Stalin remained on it. It seems that only Lenin's timely death saved him from being erased too.

Notwithstanding the objections of liberal historians, the manipulation of history is going on in all parts of the world. It does not mean that there are only deliberate and malicious manipulations. It should always be taken into account that different people have different viewpoints on the same event. They may have different angles and different conclusions. One man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist.

Probably only exceptionally capable historians are able to discover the real history of Central Europe and the Balkans amidst the opposing claims and counterclaims of the parties in the area. The situation in the supposedly more advanced and liberal countries of Western Europe is not much better. Ask a Dane about Schleswig-Holstein or southern Sweden and be surprised at the sudden emotional intensity of a usually placid people. One might get similar reaction asking a German about Alsace – Lorraine, (or Elsass and

Lotharingien, according to him) or an Austrian about South Tirol, or an Irishmen about the 6 counties of Ulster. Of course, ask a Swede, a Frenchmen, an Italian or an Ulster Protestant and exactly opposite histories will be heard with similar emotions.

The examples shown above are results of comparatively recent conflicts, allowing for more intense feelings. However, in recent times, archaeology and ancient history became emotional and actual battlefields, not less than the history of the last millenium.² Thus, in recent years the Hungarians discovered that the Sumerians of 5500 years ago were their blood-brothers; while the white supremacy warriors discovered that the originators of the first Chinese civilization were no others than the Tocharians, who lived in what is now Chinese Turkestan, had blue eyes, and blonde hair, wore Celtic tartans and spoke a western Indo-European language, belonging to the so-called 'centum' group and not to the eastern Indo-Iranian part of the family of languages, the so-called 'satem' group.

However, the battle for the remote past is most intensive in the Middle East. Most of the archaeologists in Israel make efforts to extend the ideological base of their existence there. The other sides of the conflict do the opposite: they attempt to eliminate all traces to actual or imagined reference of Jewish existence in Middle East, both in the present and in the misty past.

So, when an Italian archaeological expedition discovered about 20,000 clay tablets in the archives of a North Syrian ancient city, called Ebla, and found that the tablets which originated from the last third of the third millenium BC. were written in a North Semitic dialect, akin to Hebrew, with a galore of Biblical names and names of biblical towns, they had to retract the publication of their findings under pressure from the Syrian authorities.³

Similarly, when the Saudis discovered on the shores of the Red Sea a column with archaic Hebrew inscription, they carefully removed the column. Probably, the most amazing story of this archaeological battle comes from Egypt. In the late 70's and early 80's a tomb of two officials of Pharaoh Djoser was shown. An inscription on the tomb told that the two officials "collected grain for a 7 years famine". There was no mention of Joseph or the Hebrews on the inscription, but to be on the safe side, the Egyptian authorities closed the site and so it remains until today.

Another archaeological battle involving the Egyptian authorities concerns the possible age of the Sphinx. A few years ago a new book⁴ appeared claiming that the Sphinx was created much earlier than the estimated date of

the 1st Dynasty, e.g. before the start of the Egyptian civilization. The claim was based on the facts that the lower part of the Sphinx, which is normally covered by sand, was eroded by water as opposed to the upper part which was eroded by wind-blown sand, and the area where the Sphinx is located had no rainfall at all since 8000 BC., ipso facto, the Sphinx should be older than that. The Egyptian government violently opposes these findings as it would place the creation of the Sphinx even before the predynastic period, diminishing the Egyptian government's claim for the cultural continuity of Egyptian history.

This short excursion into the politics of history and archaeology was presented in order so the reader could see what can be done, and what is being done all the time, and judge for himself the claim of this book that it has no agenda to prove or disprove anything. The only purpose of this book is to present the stories of the Patriarchs, as were described in the book of Genesis, between the story of the Deluge and the return of Jacob from Haran to Canaan., and evaluate them in view of the latest archaeological discoveries. Indeed, this book is in the form of a secular commentary to that part of the Old Testament, with proven archaeological facts replacing theological arguments or findings of previous commentaries, written by past sages.

It must be equivocally stated here that it seems to be an impossible task to find absolute proofs for the events and persons described in those chapters of the Bible. Even, if we could find contemporary documents with the names Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, it would not create an absolute proof that the document contains the name of the Patriarch and not someone else having the same name. Thomas L. Thompson⁵ wrote that if we find the name David in the registers of England of the mid-19th century, it would not mean that David Copperfield was a historical person. It would only mean that Charles Dickens gave a common name to a character in his book.

The example given above by Thomas L. Thompson is what is called 'parallelism', and it is always a questionable practice to use it as a proof. The use of the name David is not a good example, as that name was in constant use in Britain, especially in the Celtic areas, like Wales and Scotland. However, when the question is put slightly differently, a very different answer is received.

When the priests who assumedly wrote the mythological stories of the Bible, or collected them from old folktales, and included the story of barren Sarah offering her handmaid, Hagar, to her husband as her replacement, it

might have been incredible and unbelievable at that time. The custom did not exist in the second half of the first millennium BC, neither in Israel nor anywhere else in the Fertile Crescent. So, as far as the priests were concerned, the Sarah and Hagar story was about as historic as the story of St. George and the Dragon.

Now, at a much later date, in fact about twenty years ago, some archive is unearthed where a legal document, a marriage contract in fact, was found, originating at that mythical period, showing without doubt that replacing a barren wife with her handmaiden was a common practice. Now, we have a case of parallelism with parallels rather more complex than the name David, and the alternatives have to be tested.

Either there is a random coincidence of conditions or indeed, the mythological stories refer to some archaic practice, which was in common use at the time of the creation of the story. The answer to this riddle is obvious. The story of Sarah and Hagar is much nearer to a reflection to an actual event than it was before, even though no marriage contract was found mentioning Sarah and Abraham by name, and lining out the conditions.

The discoveries of the period after World War II. put a new light on the Biblical stories and helped to create a narrative in which they could be presented and proven by factual proofs, as opposed to theological arguments. Which point brings us to the crux of the matter.

The Old Testament is a large complex of books that can be viewed from many angles; from that of theology, history, archaeology and mythology. Even a political angle is possible, if one accepts the view of some experts who claim that there were internal political considerations influencing the structure and the contents of the Old Testament. Of course, if one is a believer then the Old Testament was at least inspired by divinity. Therefore, any commentary has to accept that fact and not the results of new archaeological discoveries.

Indeed, there is a possible conflict between the attitude of the two parties. The first party is that of the believers, who see in the books of the Bible uncontroversial proof of divine direction, without a need of scientific proof, as the belief in divine origin is proof in itself. The second party is that of the scientists who see in the books of the Bible a collection of mythological stories, whose authenticity must be corroborated by historical evidence. In this respect, there is no difference between the stories told by the books of the Bible, and those told by other epics, like the books of Homer, the Rig

Veda, and others. Once this basic difference can be overcome, it is found that there are not many differences between contents of the relevant parts of the Bible and the findings of this book.

The books of the Bible, especially the relevant parts of them, have two types of narratives: the first is of theological nature and the second is historical. The two parts of narratives are intertwined. When we examine, for instance, the story of the Deluge, then we have the description of some actual happening, which might or might not be based on actual historical event and we are given the cause of that happening and its outcome. The story of the Deluge itself, the rains, the flooding and the search for dry land is supposed to be a description of some historical event and we might attempt to search for it, and indeed this is what generations of archaeologist were doing. The cause of the Deluge: transgression of the people and its outcome: a Divine promise not to punish the people again, are matters of belief, and we are not supposed to find any corroborating evidence.

There are, however, other theological narratives in the Old Testament, especially in those parts, which are under examination in this book: the period of the Patriarchs, and we expect that they should have some corroborating evidence. The meaning here is to the basic story of all monotheistic religions: the rejection by Abraham the common religion of his period, which was a complex ritual of idolatry and accepting the principle of monotheism and receiving a covenant. This was a religious revolution, on which the religion of half of present mankind is based. It was a major religious event, and we expect to find some contemporary evidence of its occurrence.

It is thought that Abraham was born in the 23rd century BC. We have actual documentary proof of the existence of the first monotheistic religion, Judaism, about fifteen hundred years after that revolution. If this is the only proof of that religious revolution, then it is a case of 'post hoc, propter hoc'. There are of course, many mentions in the Bible of that religious revolution but they are in those parts that are under examination. So the circumcision, which is the outward sign of that covenant, is mentioned first in Genesis 17 and has a major part in the destruction of Shechem, as described in Genesis 34. Both are part of the examined chapters and have no historical corroboration. Still, surprisingly enough, there are some tenuous but plausible historical data that point to a religious upheaval in that area and in that period indicated by the relevant chapters of the Genesis.

When one checks the purely historical parts of those chapters of the Old

Testament which are analyzed in this book, there are three possible results:



There were some instances where the biblical stories were corroborated by archaeological or historical data. Corroborative proof does not mean that a contemporary newspaper was found from the town of Hebron, reporting a real-estate transaction between Ephron the Hittite and Abraham. It only means that the transaction of the sale of the Cave of Machpela, which became the burial cave of the family, was done according to Hittite laws. Similarly, it can be shown that when Sarah, who was barren, offered her handmaiden to her husband to take her place, it was a common practice at that part of the world at that time. One cannot expect to have a better proof from that far-away period.



There were other elements with contradictions between the biblical narrative and the findings of the book. It must be pointed out that the contradictions are not with the original text of the Old Testament, but with later interpretations. The original text was written in Hebrew, translated to Aramaic, then to Greek and finally to some European language. So, when in one of the translations the town from where Abraham started his journey is named Ur of the Chaldeans, then it obviously points to the southern Sumerian city of Ur, where in the first millenium BC. the Chaldeans were the rulers. However, Ur of the Chaldeans is not written in the Old Testament. What was written is Ur of the Kasdim, which is not Chaldean. When people wrote the interpretations of the Old Testament, they were not aware that there was another Ur, in northern Mesopotamia, about 600 miles north of the first Ur and the Old Testament meant the northern Ur. It is a moot point because it completely changes the whole narrative and explains many things that previously caused serious contradictions in the understanding.



There are biblical stories not receiving attention in the analysis of the book as no archaeological or historical evidence was found which could prove or disprove them. Judging from the large amount of new data garnered in the last 50 years, and the pace at which further data is collected, it seems to be only a question of time, until the amount of new data will require a new analysis.

The most meaningful difference between the results of the current historical

analysis and the conventional interpretation is in the general narrative, rather than in the individual stories. This part is exactly the point that might cause the greatest controversy, if indeed there will be a controversy.

A historical narrative is a framework of a story which is similar to that well-known puzzle-game for children, where children have to connect dots with a straight line in a specific order, until some meaningful picture emerges out of the meaningless jumble of dots on the page.

When we attempt to create a historical narrative of a recent occurrence, we suffer from a multitude of data, which simply makes it impossible to connect them into a unique picture. The multitude of data compels the researcher to make some adjustments, by eliminating some data or by compressing others into a single dot. In simple terms, they have to make a value judgment as to the validity and applicability of the data. The result is that any resulting picture will be highly subjective, as others will not necessarily accept value judgment of one historian. This is also the reason why each period rewrites the histories of previous ages.

Analyzing data of 4000 – 4500 years ago meets the opposing problem. The number of data points is insufficient to connect the dots and create a meaningful picture. Therefore, one should add non-historical data, mythological, anthropological, etc. to complement them. This again raises the point of subjective value judgment and removes the stamp of objectivity from the resulting picture.

This book added a great number of reliable dots to the jumble on the page. They are still insufficient to create a meaningful picture by themselves, but much less additional non-historical data is necessary to do so. However, incorporating the new data into the narrative, creates a new picture rather different from the previous pictures.

Hopefully, further archaeological discoveries will add new dots on the page and the picture will prove the present narrative without additional, subjective, additions.

NOTES:

- 1 Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America*, W.W.Norton, New York, 1998, p.77
- 2 Mark Pluciennik, *A Perilous but Necessary Search: Archaeology and European Identities* Reprint of a paper submitted to the Conference on Archaeology, Ethnicity and Nationalism, 1996 p. 1/19:" My

uncontroversial starting point is that archaeology is always open to overtly political , and is always produced in particular conditions – personal, social, cultural and economic. These conditions include the academic and scientific milieu of the production of knowledge and of claims of understanding the past

- 3 Prof. Paolo Matthiae of Rome University was in charge of the excavations. Prof. Giovanni Pettinato of the same University was the epigraphist working on the tablets. Their report Was published in Biblical Archaeologist, May 1976 and in public lectures at the University of Michigan in November 1976. The Syrian government was extremely irate when they learned that the Ebla tablets brought to light evidences relating to the Patriarchs. They demanded to remove the original translator from the project, and so it was done. In addition, it was then 'arranged' for the translator to recant some of his original translations, stating that he had been in error. The recantation was published in Biblical Archaeological Review, May – June, 1980 It seems that the Syrians themselves drafted the text of the recantation, as it is doubtful that an Italian Professor of Epigraphy would express himself as: "These allegations [linking the Ebla tablets with the Bible] were propagated by Zionist-American centers to be exploited for atrocious purposes aimed at proving the Expansionist and colonialistic views of the Zionist leaders", Ibid, p.49
- 4 Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval, The Message of the Sphinx, Three Rivers Press, New York, 1966 , pp. 18 - 21 Marvin Harris, Cannibals and Kings, Vintage Books, New York also treated the subject, 1991, p.30 and by an article in World History Bulletin, Spring 1996, Redating the Sphinx
- 5 Thomas L. Thompson, The Mythic Past, Biblical Archaeology and the Myth of Israel, Basic Books, New York, 1999

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The Book of Genesis - Myth or History?

The Old Testament is a large complex of books, containing theological, legal, historical, mythological and even poetical elements; it is also the Holy Book, or at least one of the Holy Books, to about one-half of humanity. How would one define the Old Testament if one disregards it being Holy, and as such it is beyond human critics. When one reads the Old Testament in the original, and sticks to the parts of history and poetry, one finds that it is very readable and there are parts, especially those of the prophets, where the contents are expressed in beautiful poetry. As a literary work, and I mean it in the secular sense, it is at least on the level with the large epic works of the first millenium BC, like the poems of Homer or Hesiod, the Hymns of the Rig-Veda, or the Avesta of the Iranians. In my opinion and purely in the literary sense, it surpasses all possible epic works of early history. But how would one define the Old Testament in the light of the question of the title of the chapter?

There are parts of the Old Testament, which are easily defined. Those books which deal with the events of the first millenium, like the books of Kings, Chronicles, and those of the Prophets, are more or less accepted as histories in the form of "Annales" (chronicles). The books of Joshua, Judges and Samuel seem to be on the border of history and mythology, while the historical parts of the first five books are generally deemed as rather a collection of mythological tales, and do not represent real history,

This study examines the first part of the Book of Genesis, the first of the books of the Old Testament, which describes the earliest parts of Jewish history, the story of creation, the Garden of Eden, the expulsion and the story of the Patriarchs. If we want to express this period in the terms of our modern chronology, then this study covers about 3500 years, from the first quarter of the 6th millenium BC. until the last quarter of the 3rd millenium. There seems to be no way to estimate the period when it was actually

written. However, judging from clues and also by comparing it to other large epic works, it seems to be certain that before finalizing it in a written format, it was orally transmitted for a long time from fathers to sons.

Modern critical scholars have recognized four authors for the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, designated

J (the Yahwist or, in German, Jahwist source)

E (the Elohist source)

P (the Priestly source)

D (the Deuteronomist source, whose contribution to the Pentateuch is confined to the Book of Deuteronomy)



the narratives of J,E and P are intertwined in the first four books of the Old Testament



the list is included because there is a great importance of the designated authors for subsequent development. It is especially true for J and E authors

So the subject of this study is the first part of the first book of the Old Testament, the Genesis, which is generally accepted as pure mythology. However, when reading those chapters, one can see that they are in two distinct parts. The first part is the opening chapters of the book, until the appearance of Abraham, and the second part is the story of a family, from Abraham to Jacob. The first part is read like a collection of short stories, similar to the short stories of other mythologies, while in the second part there is a story, with a continuation and a plot. In addition, from the moment that the first humans appear on the scene, from the story of the Garden of Eden, there is a string of clues which tie the stories together, both chronologically and geographically.

Exactly in this sense of continuity and purpose which makes the story of the Genesis unique among the various Middle Eastern and European stories of similar contents. Philemon and Baucis, Deucalion, Utnapishtim, Ziusudra or Atrahasis, to mention only a few of Noah's counterpart in the Middle East, saved humanity like Noah did, but they were heroes of a single story, without precursors and without continuation. Here there is a sense of continuation, a belonging and a plot.

Robert Graves¹ who was an expert of Mediterranean mythology, categorized the types of myths, as follows:

1. Philosophical allegory
2. Aetiological explanation of myths no longer understood
3. Satire or parody
4. Sentimental fable
5. Embroidered history
6. Minstrel romance
7. Political propaganda
8. Moral legend
9. Humorous anecdote
10. Theatrical melodrama
- 11 Heroic saga
- 12 Realistic fiction

The points above clearly explain the difference between the mythological stories in the accepted sense and the Old Testament. Graves' categories are suitable to characterize a short story, without connections, but they are unsuitable to describe a huge complex and interlocking story like the Old Testament. Where would one put the story of the Patriarchs? In category 4 or 5 or 11 or even 12? One cannot fit the Old Testament, or even a small part of it, like the beginning of the Book of Genesis, into a narrow straightjacket of the categories of Robert Graves. It is a long and continuous story, passing through three very long generations; it does not fit into any of the categories above.

When one examines the story of the Patriarchs and attempts to figure out what they represent, one can reach a number of possible choices:



the stories tell of real historical events, possibly combining many historical persons into one and presenting the original stories with much embellishment.



it is an invention of some ancient storyteller who created a work of fiction, woven together into one complex work.



the stories tell some old legends, half-remembered and tied together by a common frame of a general idea and theological content.

It seems that none of the above fits the structure of the Old Testament.

Even if one accepts that it is mythology, at least partially so, one has to admit that it is a huge edifice of stories, wonderfully coordinated. How many times, the Covenant of Abraham is mentioned in the text of the Old Testament? How many times the bondage in Egypt and the miraculous escape from there? The books of the Bible are interconnected with innumerable references, which at least points to some conscious coordination and editing.

Despite all that, there does not seem to be much doubt that the Book of Genesis and many others belong to the world of myths. The direct purpose of this study is to find some historical coordination to the story under investigation. The secondary purpose is of a general nature; with extreme importance to this study, but not only to this particular study, which is whether mythological stories can have some historical contents, and if yes, in what measure? This brings us to the main question: What are myths in a general sense? There are many views and only a few can be detailed here.

There are views, according to which mythological stories are collective memories expressed in a stylized format, e.g. if the code of the stylized format is known then one can deduce the underlying historical facts from the mythological stories. Sometimes, mythical tales there are not even stylized stories but plain facts. Richard Heinberg ² showed that the northern Klamath tribe told stories about the creation of the Crater lake which happened about 10,000 years ago, and of Dreamtime stories told by Australian aborigines featuring animals extinct since some 10,000 – 15,000 years. There seems to be no doubt that these stories and many others, are indeed collective memories of actual events that happened many millennia ago.

Robert Graves, himself, thought that at least some of the Greek myths had solid historical foundations. ³ According to Graves all those mythical stories about Zeus and other Greek gods seducing or raping nymphs to the bitter opposition of Hera, were really memories of chieftains of roving Greek bands marrying or raping the local priestesses of the Great Goddess. As the Greek chieftains saw themselves, they were the reincarnations of their gods, and the local priestesses were embodiments of the Great Goddess, as nymphs of a spring or a sacred grove, the mythological framework was ready-made as retained memory of actual happening.

There are about as many explanations about the meaning of myths, as there are observers remarking on it. Most of the observers seem to think on the lines of Robert Graves, e.g. that myths seem to reflect some long-ago

occurrence, existing only in the collective subconscious, which is the proper expression of mythical tales.

The specific language of the observers explaining this phenomenon comes, of course, from the jargon of their own profession. Karl Jung, the eminent Swiss psychologist, claimed that the fantasies of the collective subconscious, meaning the tales of myths, stem from actual experiences of ancient ancestors. In his view, the study of the development of prehistory should be a considerable importance to the understanding of myths, and certainly the understanding of the mythical code may open the way to better understanding of prehistoric times.

On the opposing side of Robert Graves, Karl Jung, Mirce Eliade and Levy-Strauss, all of them accepted the basic idea that myths are signs of collective memories of old and long-forgotten events, stands Joseph Campbell, who spent a lifetime analyzing myths and channeling away from being manifestations of collective memories. In one of his books⁴ he claimed the following, in direct confrontation to the scientists quoted above:

"Thorough the inhabited world, in all times and under every circumstance, the myths of man have flourished, and they have been the living inspiration for whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind. It would not be too much to say that myth is the secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestations."

Expressing in simple, and more easily understandable terms, Joseph Campbell thought that myths are not generated by collective experiences at the dawn of history, or even before that, but they are results of human need for something occult and unexplainable, and those needs are generated by human body and soul.

There is, therefore, a disagreement between scholars as for the real meaning of myths, although those scholars who tend to see in myths some measure of expression of ancient collective memories, seem to be the majority. This study, which attempts to match mythological stories, appearing in the book of Genesis, with archaeological and historical data, might be a valid empirical test for this question.

There is another aspect of mythology, which should be taken into account. If mythology is indeed an expression of past experiences, then the value of the stories is in transferring the information of the past to later generations. That transfer was in the form of storytelling, at least in early historical times,

before the general spread of writing, which was very late indeed. If a story was written on a clay tablet, or on a piece of parchment, and stored in some royal archive, it does not mean that ordinary people had access to it. It did not happen so even in very modern time, probably not earlier than the last two centuries. So, even if the myths were written down, they were transferred orally between generations by storytellers or by priests.

According to Ignatius Donnelly⁵, myths and legends were meant to be transmitted orally and were distorted by civilization:

"...scepticism becomes the synonym for intelligence, men no longer repeat, they doubt, they dissect, they sneer, they invent. If the myths survive the treatment, the poets take it up and make it their stock-in-trade; they decode it in a masquerade of frippery and finery, and the poor barbarian legend survives at last, if it survives at all, like the conflagration of Ovid, or King Arthur in Tennyson."

Myths are different in ancient environment, when storytellers tell them to entranced listeners, from what they became in the environment of Sunday schools. Gilbert Murray⁶ wrote in his "Five Stages of Greek Religion" about primitive peasants in remote, mountainous areas of Greece, who wait with excitement for the announcement "Christos Aneste" (Christ has risen) and the answer "Alethos Aneste" (He has verily risen), as without the young king returning from death, there will not be a harvest, and the dead world will not revive. The story is ageless, or at least goes back to the earliest times of transition to agriculture; the bearer of the story is changing, from Dionysos to Christ.

For us, the stories of the Genesis might or might not have historical truths, but for those who heard those stories in ancient times, they were God's truth without any doubt. As they are now for believers.

The primary aim of this study is to find archaeological and historical corroboration to the biblical stories, provided of course that the mythological stories indeed have some historical foundations. There are a number of comments to be added here.

There are two geographic areas where archaeological or historical evidences might be found. There are, however, innumerable difficulties in examining those territories.



the southern area is the hill area of Canaan, where according to

the Book of Genesis the Hittites lived, is under Palestinian administration for the most part. They are not exactly keen of providing proof of Jewish existence in that area in any period of history.



The northern area, that of Harran and Ur of Kasdim, is partly under Syrian sovereignty with even less enthusiasm than the Palestinians to allow looking for historical proofs to strengthen possible Jewish claims. Some of the territory belongs to Turkey and that area is the scene of virtual guerilla warfare.

These, and other factors, caused that out of the 6000 sites surveyed in Palestine, less than 200 were excavated and out of the estimated 500,000 documents less than 10 % were published.⁷ The cause is not always political. Palestine was always, and still is, a densely populated country. There are limitations of conducting excavations in built-up areas. Israel is not unique in that respect, The same applies to the city of Rome and other Roman sites all over Europe.

Historical documents can be found in archives, as in Tel-el-Amarna, Ugarit, Ebla, Nuzi, Mari, Emar and other north-Syrian and eastern Turkish sites. The excavations showed many parallel settings to the biblical stories; they provide wonderful geographical, cultural, linguistic and religious backdrop to the stories, but no direct testimonies.⁸

However, even without the conditions and difficulties listed above, there is practically no possibility finding direct documentary proof for personae or events of more than 4000 years ago. In fact, it is doubtful that apart of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian inscriptions and royal archives, there are any documentary evidences at all for events before the 1st millenium BC. After all, the Patriarchs, if they were real persons, did not belong to the coterie of rulers and below the rulers not many people left documentary evidences.

It seems that the most of what one can expect to find from a period over 4000 years ago, is conjectural, but it seems to be quite sufficient to present the stories of the Patriarchs in an acceptable historical light. Indeed, there is much more information about the cultural and religious background of the assumed period of the Patriarchs, than for others, much later events, chronologically speaking, like the period of the founding of Rome or the dark age of Greece.

The attitude of scholars to mythological stories can be ambiguous. A scholar can accept in general, that mythological stories may have historical contents, while denying that to some particular story. As the stories of the Patriarchs are among the most prominent and widely known mythological tales, attracting attention from many quarters and because of various reasons; it is obvious that there are many pros and cons about the historicity of the Old Testament.

Mike Furey⁹ has written about it in his discussion about the quest for the historical Abraham and it is worth while to quote it.

"It is commonly accepted among scholars that the Bible we hold in our hands was the product of some priest-politicians around 500 – 300 BC, who were trying to legitimize their authority base. I reject this view. I do not reject it because of blind devotion to the Bible, but because it is not supportable by the facts, as I have studied them since 1979. If it were true that God used a group of fifth century priests to edit old fables and weave them together to unify a political state called Israel under Yahwism, that would be more miraculous than what I believe as an evangelist."

Mike Furey was certainly right and he could have added much more. At the time when the alleged editing took place, there were many unknown elements. When the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah was included, sand and brimstone covered that area of the destruction for about 2000 years. Nobody could have known then that 2500 years later the names of the destroyed towns will be found on the tablets of Ebla, as important trading partners. If they indeed did nothing else but linking existing legends into one book, they surely would have left out elements which were non-existent or unknown in their own time.

As far as for the opinions of the scholars, who were involved in archaeological research of the area and the period of the Old Testament, the views are spread over a wide range of opinions. There are the enthusiastic advocates of the full historicity of the Bible, then those who claim "yes but" and finally those who no less enthusiastically define the Old Testament as unproven and unprovable mythological legends. The very large numbers of scholars who spent lifetimes on these problems do not allow fully to adjudicate the claims. There are literally thousands of books, which appeared on the subject, with many more appearing each year. There is no sign that this flood of books is going to end soon. Add to all these the large number of periodicals, full of articles about the Bible, dissecting it from the viewpoints of history, archaeology, linguistics, theology and others. To give justice to all viewpoints, only a few extreme opinions are quoted here from

both ends of the scale.

Among the most outspoken for the historicity of the Old Testament in general and for the Patriarchal stories in particular, was Nelson Glueck.^{[10](#)}

"As a matter of fact...it may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which conform, in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries. They form tesserae in the vast mosaic of the Bible's almost incredibly correct historical memory."

Indeed, when one reads some of the books and articles about the Patriarchal era, one has a curious impression that the knowledge from earlier periods seem to be more full and comprehensive than from much later age. Actually, this impression exists not for Biblical archaeology alone, but for other parts of the Middle East too.^{[11](#)} According to Arthur C. Custance, not long ago we knew more about the customs and habits of people in and about the time of Abraham than we knew about England in the dark ages.

The quotations above might contain some enthusiastic exaggeration, induced, no doubt, by religious motivation, but by and large, most of those who attempted to decipher the biblical stories came to the conclusion that they have strong historical basis.^{[12](#)}

One interesting article among those who accepted the historicity of the Bible and who attempted to define the task of archaeology in the research is that of W. G. Dever^{[13](#)} who wrote:

"Nowhere in the Bible do we have more than a passing hint about what the people looked like, what they wore and ate, what their houses and furniture was like, what went on in the streets and plazas of the average town, how agriculture and trade were conducted, how people wrote and kept records, how they went about their daily chores and entertained themselves, how long they lived and what they died of and how they were buried. These are precisely the details archaeology can supply."

On the other end of the scale there are many, not less convincing, arguments. Robert Coote of the San Francisco Theological Seminary stated, that "...the period of the Patriarchs....as devised by the writers of the Scriptures...never existed". Niels Peter Lemche, a professor at the

University of Copenhagen flatly categorized the stories of the Patriarchs as "...fiction written around the middle of the first millenium BC." to establish a pedigree for Israel after the Babylonian exile. There was a cover story in 1998 in the evangelical magazine Christianity Today about the archaeology and the Bible and in that story it was stated that:

"Not one shred of direct evidence has been found for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or the 400-plus years the children of Israel sojourned in Egypt."¹⁴

Probably the strongest condemnation of the historicity of the Old Testament came from Professor Thomas L. Thompson¹⁵ of Copenhagen University in 1992:

"If we reflect on how easy it is to challenge the historicity of not only David or Solomon, but the events in the reigns of Hezekiah or Josiah...the every substance of any historical project that attempts to write the history of the late second or early first millenium BC in Palestine on the basis of a direct integration of biblical and extra biblical sources...must appear not only dubious but wholly ludicrous."

Judging from the findings of this study, as it will unfold in the following chapters, it can be stated, that there is a general historical accuracy, especially in the period after King Solomon, after the separation of the united kingdom into southern and northern parts. To this period, there was much corroborative evidence found in non-biblical sources, in contemporary Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian archives.

Indeed, it is not only the corroborative evidences that add to the historicity of the Old Testament. Hebrew was a written language since about 1300 BC. When Israel has reached the stage of monarchy it was a literal society, and as such the events of the kingdom were recorded in a chronicle, of which at least some books became later parts of the canon of the Bible. We know from the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles that there were scribes who were in charge of maintaining the chronicles of the kingdoms. We also know of scribes who wrote down the speeches of the prophets. A short time ago a clay stopper was found with the name Baruch etched on it. Baruch was the scribe who wrote down the prophecies of the Prophet Hezekiel.

Probably, the scribes belonged to the priesthood. Fustel de Coulanges wrote in his book: The Ancient City¹⁶ that when Pausanias visited Greece in the 2nd century AD, he could access the chronicles of the cities he visited. The

chronicles were written and carefully maintained by the local priesthood for hundreds of years. As the chronicles were counted as religious documents, they had to be accurate and unalterable. It is true that chronicles might have had involuntary errors, because of search for the marvelous and the faith in the greatness of the Gods, but voluntary falsehoods was something which nobody at that time could have thought of. They believed that all events came from God and as such they were sacred.

If people accuse the ancient priesthood of editing sacred chronicles and changing them at will to fit them to some temporary need, then these people commit a terrible anachronism. This act might be possible in modern and cynical age, it might have even be possible in later republican Rome, which was not less cynical than the present, but it is implausible for the fifth or sixth century BC, when still everything revolved around tradition and religion.

As for the period of the united monarchy or the period of the Judges, there was little corroborative evidence found. Indeed, there was a time when there was doubt about the historicity of the united monarchy, especially the persons of David and Solomon. Since then a number of independent non-biblical, supporting evidence was found, but not too many.

The first mention of the name Israel is on the famous Merneptah Stele. It was set up by Pharaoh Merneptah who ruled after Ramses II. The Stele is from the year 1207 BC.; it records a victorious campaign in Canaan. Among others it notes:

"Israel is laid waste. Its seed is not."

The stele and text are obvious. In 1207 BC, about 3200 years ago there was a political entity, called Israel, and it was important enough to be recorded on a victory monument. It was not the only one.

In 1993, Abraham Biran of Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and Joseph Naveh of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem announced that they found an inscription bearing the phrases "House of David" and "King of Israel". The inscription – dated 9th century BC, only a century after David's reign was found at Tel-Dan, in the north of Israel. It described a victory by a neighboring king over Israel. The skeptics' claim, that King David might never have existed, became hard to defend.

In addition to the inscription at Tel-Dan, there is the famous Mesha Stele. A French scholar reported the new discovery in 1994 in the Biblical

Archaeological Review after a long research on the famous stele. The Mesha stele, also known as the Moabite Stone, is the most extensive inscription ever recovered from ancient Palestine. Found in 1868 at the remains of biblical Dibon, the basalt stone is in the Louvre today. Mr. Lemaire spent seven years studying the stele, and he concluded that "House of David" appears on the stone. So, after this discovery, there are two 9th century references to the dynasty of King David.

There is another important discovery. It is important in the view of some of the claims stating that the Jewish priesthood fabricated the whole Old Testament after the Babylonian exile. The most eminent expositor of this theory is John van Seters, of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.^{[17](#)}

In 1979 an Israeli archaeologist Gabriel Barkay found two tiny silver scrolls inside a Jerusalem tomb. They were dated at around 600 BC, before the destruction of Solomon's Temple. The scrolls were carefully unrolled and a blessing from the Book of Numbers was found etched on their surface. That meant that parts of the Old Testament were copied before they were written, according to John van Seters.

Only a few of the new discoveries in Israel were included here. However, archaeology and discoveries is a continuing affair. As it was stated before, out of 6000 possible archaeological sites, less than 200 were excavated.

The story of the Patriarchs has evolved not only in Israel, but also in northern Syria and southwestern Turkey. It can be assumed that future excavations will add to the already considerable amount of material. But even if no new excavations will be undertaken in the near future, out of political or security considerations, the material gained by previous excavations, which still waits for decipherment and translation, is sure to add to our knowledge of the period. But even today, the already known facts are sufficient to provide a narrative, based upon a seamless combination of biblical and non-biblical evidences.

Kenneth Kitchen, an Egyptologist of the University of Liverpool, published in 1994 a detailed article in the Biblical Archaeological Review in which he wrote that the biblical stories about Abraham are eminently plausible. Drawing on non-biblical records, he argued that everything from the quoted price of slaves to the style of warfare to the laws of inheritance, and many others, in Abraham's days is consistent with Bible accounts.^{[18](#)}

Despite all that wealth of evidence, we can expect additional findings to round up the narrative, but it is most unlikely that we shall ever have direct evidence of the Patriarchs and of their doings. There is a number of reasons for this opinion.



The story of the Patriarchs started about 4300 years ago. They were not of the ruling elite and they did not belong to any of the great powers of their world, Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is very unlikely that any of them would appear in any of the major archives.



There is a definite possibility that the chief personae of the stories, especially that of Abraham, were composite personalities, meaning that their stories were collected from more than one actual persons, probably from different areas and periods.

Thomas Mann, in his book *The Tales of Jacob*,¹⁹ hinted to this possibility. The hero of the book, the young Joseph says there that his father is Jacob, his grandfather was Isaac and his great-grandfather was Abraham, but beyond them there was another mythical triad, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The possibility that the Patriarchs are composite characters does not reduce the historicity of the stories, only extends them into wider areas and deeper periods.



It is not known what language the Patriarchs and their family spoke. Judging from their route to reach Canaan, it is doubtful that it was some north western Semitic dialect. They were probably still living in a semi-literate society, where writing, if it existed already, was still a closely guarded reserve of royalty and priesthood. So, the chance of finding a letter from Abraham, telling his folks back in Haran about his trip to Canaan, is extremely unlikely. Lacking that, scholars will continue to collect shreds of new evidence to fill the gaps in the puzzle.

About later periods, and the lack of corroborative information between the tales of the Bible and the non-biblical, mainly Egyptian, sources, there are a number of points to which I intend to draw attention, without expressing any personal views in the matter.

Since the days of Manetho, the Egyptian priest, who drew up the chronology of the Egyptian dynasties, in the 3rd century BC, there is a gaping discrepancy between the Egyptian records and the stories of the

Bible. In simple terms, either the list of Manetho is too long, or the Bible chronology is too short. The discrepancy exists not only with the Bible, but the Bible provides the single comprehensive book of history at that time. Not a single country in the Near East, neither Egypt, nor Mesopotamia nor any other has a book of history, which tells the story of their country in chronological order. So, as there are no other comprehensive books of history, only collections of laws, hymns, epic tales, etc., no gap can be found. It is a subject that occupies scholars at least since the early years of the 20th century. There are the famous, and controversial, books of Emmanuel Velikovsky and a later book of David M. Rohl.²⁰

Velikovsky based his research upon astronomical events and on changes in the length of the year, following the astronomical catastrophes. David M. Rohl has chosen a much simpler and much less controversial method to explain the gap in the chronologies. He accepted the list of dynasties compiled by Manetho, but claimed that there were dynasties that ruled concurrently in different parts of Egypt, not consecutively as claimed by Manetho. This approach has shortened considerable the Egyptian chronology.

Using his method, many biblical tales, which until then were relegated to legends, returned to being historical facts. Previously the Bible told stories about Egypt or other parts of the world, which must have had some signs in Egyptian records, and the Egyptian records had no knowledge of them. On the other hand, the Egyptian records told about wars and conquests in Canaan, with local rulers in historical times, of which there was no mention in the Bible. No wonder that some Bible experts relegated the Bible among the mythical tales.

The possible shift in the respective chronologies is one of the problems. The second problem is that of names. Each Egyptian ruler had a number of names, each name being used for different occasions. It is possible that the stories of the Bible record one name but not that which the Egyptian records have used. The same can apply to the corresponding records too. There is a possibility that the names David and Solomon were not private names but titles, which later turned into private names.

Goliath, the Philistine warrior, was told in the Bible to have been slain by David and by Elhanan. Similarly, it is still not certain whether the given name of Solomon was not Adonijahu. It is entirely possible, even probable, that the given names were different from the names taken as rulers. It was a common practice at that time and there is no reason why this practice was not in use in Israel too. David Rohl brings in his book a beautiful example

for the possibility of using names that were different from that used by the Bible.

In the Amarna archives a few tablets were found, with letters from Canaanite rulers about matters common to them and to the Pharaoh, who was then Akhenaton, the religious reformer.

Among the letters, there were a number from a ruler called Labayu. This name is unknown in the biblical records. However, when reading the contents of the letters, it seems to be clear that Labayu is really King Saul, the first king of Israel. What are the clues, which brought David Rohl to this conclusion.

William Foxwell Albright studied one of the letters, EA 252, in 1943. He concluded that the letter was originally written in idiomatically pure Hebrew and then translated into Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the time. It seems that Labayu was not very popular with the Pharaoh. In another letter, the ruler of Damascus, Aziru, warns the Pharaoh:

"Are we to act like Labayu when he was giving the land of Shechem to the Habiru."

For long, this letter was placed in the period of the Israeli conquest, but no Labayu and no Aziru were found in the neighborhood and no Habiru who were given Shechem.

According to David Rohl, Labayu is King Saul, who is called in the letter "the Great Lion of Yahu". His bodyguards were indeed called "levaim" – lions (I Samuel 24 and Psalms 57.4):

My soul is among lions
And I lie among them that are set on fire,
Even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows.

As far as Aziru is concerned, no Damascene ruler with this name was found. However, at the time of King Saul there was a Damascene ruler, called Hadad-Ezer. Aziru is the Akkadian form of Ezer, so if Labayu is King Saul, then Aziru is Hadad-ezer and the Habiru to whom Saul had given Shechem were the insurgent rebels led by David.

In tablet no. EA 256 – now in British Museum – Mutbaal writes to the Pharaoh that he is east of the river Jordan and he remained faithful to the Pharaoh. After the death of King Saul and his son, Yonathan, at the hands

of the Philistines on the slopes of the Gilboa, the last remaining son of Saul, Ishbaal, has fled across the Jordan to Pella to escape David and his army. That was the time when David, and his commander, Joab, started his conquest of the whole country. The name Mutbaal, which appears on the letter, is the Canaanite form of Ishbaal, Saul's remaining son.

This short example above was brought here to show that the lack of corroboration of biblical and non-biblical sources might be the result of both chronological shifts and the use of different names for different purposes.

The same applies to names of peoples. The Old Testament is sometimes accused that it placed Hittites in ancient Palestine and it is an anachronism. It is true that the heyday of the Hittite Empire was in the 2nd millenium BC, but according to the theories of Colin Renfrew²¹ there were Indo-European tribes who were natives of Anatolia and south-eastern Turkey. This theory later received further enhancement, as it is clearly shown in Chapter 4 of this study. It is entirely possible that the use of the name was indeed anachronistic, but only the name and not the substance.

South of the Black Sea, there were a number of Indo-European tribes, without much difference between them. As they settled in different areas, without much contact between them, they developed different dialects and eventually different languages. However, their basic culture remained similar to each other, They became known in historic times, as Hittites, Luwian, Palaic and Lycian. There were other similar tribes to the east of them, who later became the historical Armenians, Medes, Persians and Parthians. The western part of this family of languages, became known territorially as Hittites, Mitannis (Hurrians) or Chaldeans.

Today, we tend to draw lines on maps and color them in different color. For lack of better method, we do the same for biblical times too. It is very doubtful that people in biblical times looked on lines and colors on maps. It is entirely possible that families, clans or even whole tribes went wandering looking for better life. Some of them settled as lords of manors in the hill-country of Palestine and called themselves Hittites.²² As an added supporting evidence to this theory is the fact that in the second millenium BC there were rulers of city states, in Palestine and in east of the Jordan, who had Indo-European names. When David conquered Jerusalem at the very end of the 2nd millenium BC, Jerusalem was a Jebusite city. The Jebusites were a Hittite-Hurrian tribe, who later became mixed with Semitic, Amorite, people. The last ruler of Jerusalem was called Abdi-Heba

, a mixed Semitic-Hurrian name. His letters are also in the Amarna archive, complaining bitterly that the Habiru are nearing and no help is in sight. Until the complaints ceased. The only time when Jerusalem was conquered is the conquest of David.

In summary, this study accepts that mythological stories can contain historical elements, but also proves that this particular myth, the book of Genesis, has many corroborative evidence, based on non-biblical archaeological and historical sources.

There is one more point, which should be addressed not from the side of archaeology but from the side of commonsense.

There are experts who claim that the whole of the Israeli history before the Babylonian exile was fabricated by an interested priesthood, which after returning from the exile, wanted to create a base of legitimacy and did it by creating a legendary history, based upon falsification. Based upon modern, cynical approach, this view may have some credibility.

It can even be assumed that this approach can pass the 'cui bono' test, meaning that the priesthood had a direct interest in the falsification. However, there is one big problem here: the finished product, the false history, cannot pass the simplest test of commonsense. If I want to create a noble pedigree for myself, I certainly would not include among my ancestors people, who were slaves for more than 400 years. I certainly would not include the seamiest stories of the Old Testament. The stories of David, Bat Sheba and Urriyah the Hittite, or that of Nadab and his vineyard, are certainly not the most enlightening stories in the Old Testament, to be included into anybody's pedigree. If invent the story of David, why invent Urriyah too?

Manufacturing pedigrees for individuals and peoples is a very common occurrence. However, nobody in his right mind would invent an ancestor who was hanged for theft. The same rational is should be true for nations too. When the Romanians wanted to create a national pedigree by which to cover their being in the past a nomadic pastoral people on the Balkans, they claimed descent from the Roman legions. They left the Roman slaves alone.

There is a second moot point here. There are a number of details in the tales of the Old Testament with perfect fit to the archaeological data discovered in modern times. If the omniscient priesthood, wishing to create a new history on which to base their rule, indeed wrote the tales of the Bible, how could they know the small details which we only now know

after the discoveries in the excavations of Ebla, Nuzi, Emar, Mari, Ugarit and Tel-el-Amarna.

One of the most consistent critics of the acceptance of the Old Testament as a historical document is Thomas L. Thompson²³. He accepts the fact that there was a historical Israel, after all, there is an Egyptian document, the Merneptah Stele to prove it. However, in his opinion, the historical Israel has no resemblance to the Israel, as reflected in the Old Testament. No King Saul, King David and Salomon and no united monarchy. What remained were two small states, Israel and Judah, and unimportant ones at that. The history of Israel, as described in the Old Testament was the creation of a number of priests in the Maccabean period, who:

"...knew precious little about the immediate past and next to nothing about the distant past. But they were good poets and skilled story-tellers."²⁴

If so, then the Bible is an epic poem, similar to the poems of Homer, who was also composing epic poetry about a barely known past. It might be entirely correct to claim that neither Homer nor the compilers of the Old Testament knew the details of the distant past. After all, scientific study of the past has started only in the middle of the 19th century AD and we are aware that despite the efforts, our knowledge about the past is woefully short. Still, there are many differences between Homer and the compilers of the Bible, or the creators according to Thompson.

Homer lived and wrote in the Iron Age about an event, the siege of Troy, which occurred in the Late Bronze Age. He knew that in his own age fights are usually face-to-face, with spears or swords. He also knew that in the Bronze Age, the heroes used battle chariots for fighting, but did not know the exact details. So, in his poems the heroes use the chariots as battle taxis, to arrive at the place of the battle, alight from the chariot and fight in proper Iron Age manner.

The Old Testament has a number of inconsistencies and anachronisms, but not too many in relations to the huge amount of material. There is also an amazing fit between the most mythical stories of the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis, and there seems to be a solid historical foundation to most of them. So, there are two possibilities. Either, the stories were there, and the compilers incorporated them into the canon of the Bible, or that the creators of Bible had an uncanny inspiration to hit on the exact details, so their work would fit to historical data which was lost thousands of years before their time, and rediscovered only in the most modern times.

It should be pointed out that Ebla, for instance, was destroyed at the end of the 3rd millenium BC, about 1500 years before the creation of the new identity and discovered only in the sixties and seventies of the 20th century AD.

When they manufactured the imaginary story of King David, as the experts claim, they added a few stories to add color to it, Among others they added the story of Bat- Sheba and Urriyah the Hittite. At that time, and today too, there are two Hebrew names with identical meanings: Urriel is one and Urriyah is the second. The first means 'El is my light' and the second 'Yahu is my light'. How could they know then that anybody who is Hittite can only be called Urriyah and never Urriel. Did they know the contents of the clay tablets, buried at the Tel of Ebla for more than 1500 years?

In my opinion, any respectable scholar wishing to join the chorus of denial, should pass first the test of commonsense.

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THE PATRIARCHS



Historical Survey

It is assumed that the stories of the Book of Genesis cover some historical facts. The analysis of the previous chapter has proved that mythological stories can represent collective memories of past events. Of course, those memories are usually encoded in some history-to-myth transfer code. One of the methods of breaking that particular code is to relate elements of the mythical tale to actual historical data. This chapter is going to do exactly that; and attempts to find the nearest chronological, geographical, ethnographical and cultural conditions to fit the stories.

The creation of this framework is imperative. The principal aim of the book is to create a historical narrative corresponding to the biblical stories, as much as possible. The biblical stories are centered on an extended family, at most a small tribe, too insignificant to be the subject of direct historical evidences. However, the story of that family should relate to a historical framework, including chronology, territory, ethnic composition, and culture. Only if the story of the family, as told by the Old Testament will be fitted within the historical framework, can it be claimed that there is indeed a close correlation between the story of the Bible and historical data. It is not an absolute proof, but it is probably the best one can hope to achieve, from a distance of over 4,000 years.

As a first step in this direction, we have to place the narrative of the Old Testament into a chronological frame. If Abraham, the first Patriarch, was a historical figure, or a composite of a number of historical figures, then some historical clues should be found which would place the story within some historical period. The narrative of the Old Testament does not help much in this particular field. The ages of the Patriarchs and the generations before them are distorted. Building acceptable chronology upon reported irrational elements as legitimate historical data would have to calculate with ages of hundreds of years. The Old Testament is not alone in this respect. The Sumerian list of kings records ages for antediluvian kings in tens of

thousands of years, which gives opportunities to writers of historical science fiction stories, but does not provide much help to serious historians. It is possible that there was some internal logic in those extraordinary ages of ancient heroes, probably to enhance their claim to divine descent, but we cannot be sure. So, the Old Testament cannot provide reliable clues as to the period of the tales.

We have to proceed, therefore, in our quest for the proper historical period, on clues found in the stories themselves. There are a number of historical events mentioned in the stories of the Old Testament and they can be used as indicators:

Abraham has left Ur, his hometown, to travel to Harran and from there to Canaan. What was the most suitable period to do so? The meaning here is not the period of the year, but the historical period when the town, or towns, named Ur was in danger and it was advisable for a prosperous man like Abraham to leave the area. According to the Old Testament, Abraham has initiated a far-reaching religious reform. It was presented in the Book of Genesis as a change from the worship of El to the worship of Yahweh. (The J versus the E school in the Bible). Does this religious reform has any historical reflection, and if yes, in what period?

Abraham and his family had constant dealings with Hittites in Palestine. He bought the Cave of the Machpela from Ephron the Hittite in Hebron; his grandson Esau married two Hittite girls from Beer Sheba. Moreover, his son, Isaac, and his grandson, Jacob, married girls from the old country, Harran, which was Hittite or Hurrian country. When could the Hittite arrive to Canaan?

During an extended drought in Canaan, Abraham traveled to Egypt. There, he met Pharaoh under curious circumstances and eventually returned to Canaan. In what period was such a meeting feasible?

Abraham had contact with the king of the Jebusite town, Jerusalem. The Jebusites were a mixed Semitic-Hurrian tribe. When was the first period when Hurrians could be in Canaan?

These are the possible historical circumstances, which should be thoroughly investigated. In addition, there are Jewish and Arab legends about Abraham, both seeing in Abraham the founder of their religion. According to Jewish tradition, Abraham was born in 2165 BC and his Egyptian journey was put at 2089 BC, when he was already 76. According to Arab tradition, Abraham was born in the 23rd century BC; not very far from the

date of the Jewish tradition.^{[1](#)}

When the list of questions above are checked, we reach about the same period. The proof of it comes from historical sources, mainly from the rich archives of Ebla:

Terah, Abraham's father, decided to leave his hometown Ur underway to Canaan. He died in Harran where he had relatives. His son, Abraham, decided to continue the journey, accompanied by his nephew, Lot. Judging from later stories, it was a journey of two clans or tribes who left Harran for Canaan. The tablets of Ebla seem to have been written in the last two generations of the city, somewhere in the 23rd century BC.

According to historical data, Sargon the Great of Akkad subjugated Ebla. After Sargon's death, Ebla revolted against Akkad and reduced its cities to vassalage. Ebla's king was named Ebrum (or Ebrium), who was placed on the throne by Sargon. In 2250 BC, Sargon's grandson, Naram-Sin, conquered Ebla and put it to the torch.

If the composite person of Abraham contains the persona of Ebrum, the reformator king of Ebla, and some chieftain in the Ur – Harran area, which was near Ebla, then the period of the early 23rd century BC was a very unhealthy one. It must have been a warzone. However, as Map 1 shows, there were two towns with identical names. One is Ur in southern Mesopotamia, on the river Euphrates, and the second is in the north, on the river Balikh, which is one of the tributaries of the Euphrates. If Terach and Abraham were living in Ur in southern Mesopotamia, as Jewish tradition places them, then they were near Elam, which at that time had designs and successes against the Sumerian cities, including Ur. Therefore, whether Abraham started his journey in either of the towns, named Ur, the years of 23rd century were dangerous in both places.

According to the Eblaite tablets, during the reign of king Ebrum a religious reform took place. The reform was manifested in the theophoric element of names. The theophoric element is that part of the name referring to god. So, the name of Mi-ka-ilu (Michael) was changed to Mi-ka-Yah and Ur-ri-El to Ur-ri-Yah. Professor Pettinato, the leader of the excavations in Ebla, himself stated in his article in the Biblical Archaeological Review, already referred to that "many of these names occur in the same form in the Old Testament, so that a certain interdependence of the culture of Ebla and that of the Old Testament must be granted". The religious changes in Ebla were major reforms, and it happened between the reign of Sargon I, and the

destruction of Ebla, in the 23rd century BC.

The first mention of the Hittites in historical sources comes also from the 23rd century BC. Naram-Sin, who destroyed Ebla, fought against a coalition of 17 kings, among them the king of Hatti, named Pamba, and the king of the Amurru, named Huwaruwas². Both had Indo-European sounding names.

Abraham visited Egypt and was received by the Pharaoh. In normal circumstances it seems to be unrealistic to expect for Pharaoh to receive a chief of a wandering clan. However, corresponding to the period of Sargon I and Naram-Sin, there was in Egypt the first Intermediate Period. It was after the collapse of the Old Kingdom and it was a time of total confusion, where every nome (district) had its own ruler, politely called Pharaoh. The story of Abraham is realistic in that confused period, which coincided with wars and destruction both in northern and southern Mesopotamia.

The contact of Abraham with Melchizedek, the ruler of the Jebusite town, Jerusalem, is more problematic. The Jebusites were a mixed tribe, between Amorites and Hurrians. The Hurrians were a non-Indo-European and non-Semitic people in northern Syria – southeastern Turkey. A clay seal imprint was found recently at an excavation of Tel-Mizan in northeast of Syria. The imprint was dated to the 23rd century BC and the town within that Tel was identified as Urkesh, the sacred capital of the Hurrians. The Hurrians were in close contact with the Hittites and other Indo-European peoples. At a later period, Indo-Europeans formed the aristocracy of the Mitanni, Kassite and Hittite kingdoms, while the common people remained solidly Hurrian. However, that was only at the beginning, in the 3rd millennium BC., and later the people merged with the aristocracy and additional Indo-Europeans, who reached the area, and Kurdistan, which is the direct continuation of those kingdoms, turned from being Hurrian to being fully Indo-European. It seems that the appearance of the Hurrians in Canaan might have been at the same time as of the Hittites.

Judging from those evidences, listed above, the period of Abraham was probably in the last centuries of the 3rd millennium BC.

The map of the territory, where the story of the Patriarchs was played out, is presented on Map 1, which is in the Section of Maps. Looking at the map, it can be seen that it does not much differ from modern maps of the same area. There are two major differences though. One is in the delta of the Nile and the second is at the meeting of the Euphrates and Tigris with

the waters of the Persian Gulf. Both differences are the result of the silt, which was deposited by the rivers in the last 4,000 years.

In the case of the Nile the change is less obvious than in Mesopotamia, where the changes of the last 4,000 years caused that both rivers combined into one, the Shatt-el-Arab, and the combined river reaches the Gulf. On the map, there is no Shatt-el-Arab, and the two rivers reach the waters of the Gulf.

There are a number of changes in southern Mesopotamia, caused by the deposit of the silt. One is that the Persian Gulf has shrunk at least by 100 kilometers, and there is a large marshy area, where previously was the Persian Gulf. The second change, that while in the 4th and 3rd millenium BC. the city of Ur was a busy port on the Euphrates, surrounded by lush green fields , today it is a dusty mound in the middle of the desert.

At that time, the Fertile Crescent, e.g. the semicircle of territory following north the two rivers from the Persian Gulf, turning west beyond the sources of the rivers and turning south and reaching the Egyptian border, had a much better climate than today. It had mild, wet winters and hot, dry summers.³ However, the green cover which at that time was still in existence, changed the climate to being much more comfortable than it is today.

The climate of the Middle East in general and the territory of Map 1 in particular, was formed by the end of the last Ice Age, and the fluctuations which followed the last deglaciation. The period of the Younger Dryas, which lasted about a thousand years and which returned the world to renewed glaciation, submerged the area into an uncommon and extended drought. It was only the first of the series of climatic changes, where clement weather alternated with dry periods. The problem was that the periods of clement weather brought a form of demographic explosion, with sizable agricultural settlements studding the map, especially in the northern part of the area.⁴

After periods of plenty came again changes in climate, with people leaving the stricken areas and congregating in oases, where game, plants, and water remained plentiful. Those oases were the valley of the Nile, the valleys of the twin rivers in Mesopotamia and in the north, where there was a huge sweet-water lake, which is now the Black Sea.⁵ Probably, the northern oasis was the most populous, as most of the earliest agricultural settlements were found in the northern part of the Middle East. The villages of Tepe Gawra,

in Kurdistan, near Mosul, or Sialk in the Iranian highlands, or Ras Shamra on the northern coast of Syria, went back to very long time. At Tepe Gawra, 26 layers of houses were excavated, which went back at least 7,000 years. At Ras Shamra, there were 40 feet of prehistoric ruins below the level of 3,000 BC. In none of these places do the excavations reach the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution. In all the levels of the excavations, perfectly formed pottery was found with mastery in pottery techniques.⁶

The obvious signs of a long agricultural history in the northern part of the Middle East and in Anatolia, brought Colin Renfrew to formulate his theory that agriculture has spread to Europe from that area..⁷ This theory was probably reinforced by a later discovery, when they found that the Black Sea has turned from a sweet water lake into a sea, by the breakthrough of the waters of the Mediterranean, raised by the water released by the deglaciation, into the Black Sea through the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. That catastrophic event caused probably the creation of the many legends of deluge in the Middle East and the dispersal of the survivals to all directions of the compass.

The catastrophe has happened just before historical times, at about 5500 BC. It was an event, which shaped the world of the Patriarchs, both their environment and ethnic composition. It is true that between the catastrophe, which happened in the 6th millenium BC and the period of the Patriarchs at the end of the 3rd millenium, there was a very long time. However, if it is correct that there was an extended period of drought before the deluge, which compelled the people to escape into oases, mainly to the lake of the Black Sea, then that catastrophe probably exterminated most of the people in that oasis. The water advanced 6 inches each day; did not leave much time for people to collect their belongings and escape. Probably, more people did escape than those did in the biblical story, Noah and family, but not by much.

It must have been a very long time, until there were sufficient number of people to create new societies, which eventually became the first urban civilizations. Here, the possible ethnic composition of the Middle East during the period of the Patriarchs is evaluated.

Who were the people in the area shown on Map 1. Here the Bible does not help much. In Gen.15 that describes the Covenant of God with Abraham, and the extent of the land of Canaan, which Abraham and his descendants are to receive, ten tribes are counted as the then inhabitants of the land between the river of Egypt and the great river of the Euphrates. The river of

Egypt is not the Nile, it is a temporary watercourse, a wadi which reaches the sea south of Gaza towards El-Arish. The ten tribes are: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaim, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites. Similarly, in Gen.13.7, it is stated that "the Canaanites and the Perizzites dwelled then in the land". Who were these people and what it means from the river of Egypt to the great river Euphrates?.

The Hebrew commentaries do not explain much about these peoples, apart of remarking laconically that these were the tribes living in Canaan at the time of Abraham. Some of the names are familiar: like the Hittites, with whom Abraham had dealings in Hebron, the Amorites , Canaanites and the Jebusites. Of the rest not much is known, apart of some vague connections. Some of the names are directly suspicious. Kadmonim means "the Ancients" and Rephaim means probably "the Ancestors".

The ethnic description in the Bible does not suit the aims of this book, so a way has to be found to fill the map with names, which are meaningful to us. In order to do so, the analysis has to retract its steps to a number of important milestones.

The first milestone is the beginning of the Neolithic Revolution, the end of the last Ice Age. It was about 11,000 years before our time, and about 6,500 years before the age of the Patriarchs. The territories on Map 1 must have been populated comparatively densely, because if had a much better climate than Europe, which was still partially under ice, and the rest had sub-arctic conditions.

It is certain that there could not have been much difference between people living in Europe and those living in the Middle East. So far as it is known from archaeological sources, Europe was populated by people emigrating from the Middle East about 50,000 years ago, so at least they had a common origin⁸. Their way of life must have been similar. There are no archaeological data either about their language or about their cultural and religious beliefs, but it seems that hunter-gatherer bands, which are constantly on the move, must have had occasional encounters with other bands. These encounters, either in the form of fights, of trade or exchange of brides, must have ensured a kind of homogeneity among those roving bands.

The following analysis about the influence of the conversion to agriculture on the creation of language and ethnic diversities is based upon the assumption that the number of the people in the pre-Neolithic Middle East

was sufficiently large, so the roving hunter-gatherer bands had to have some contact with each other, peacefully or not. If the density of people was below that limit, then hunter-gatherer bands could have developed languages and ethnic specialization, just as it happened with settled people. The Australian aborigines have about 170 languages for 30,000 people. There is no doubt that they had a common origin at about the same time when people spread to Europe from the Middle East. However, Australia is so big, that the aboriginal hunter-gatherer bands could separate without having much contact with each other.⁹

The onslaught of the Neolithic Revolution must have changed that ethnic unity. The climatic change caused the retreat of the ice from most of Europe, the partial desiccation of the Middle East, and far reaching changes in human climate. Europe became more fortunate than the Middle East. After the withdrawal of the glaciers, the continent became covered with thick deciduous forests, the game animals which escaped from the desiccated Middle East, filled the forests and continued to supply the roving hunter-gatherer bands for a long time to come.

In the Middle East there was a general deterioration of the climate, increased desiccation and desertification. The changed climatic conditions caused the transit to agriculture and dense agricultural settlements, in the valleys of the rivers and in the northern highlands.¹⁰ The transit to agriculture changed the earlier homogenous ethnicity. Settled communities are as their name. People living in them have no need to go out and meet other people. They might have had contacts with wandering traders and craftsmen, but not with people from other settlements. Lacking any policing authority, they must have looked askance on any contact with people from other villages. Obviously, there was no higher authority, to bring them together, and keep the peace while doing so.

It is not surprising that the first democratic institutions were developed in Scandinavia, among tribes having connection between roving hunter-gatherer bands for the longest period. People, who were living in isolated communities, like Sialk or Ras Shamra, or many other similar places, might or might not had some form of internal organization, but it is doubtful that they saw in the people from other settlements, anything but potential enemies. The separation of people within settled communities had to result in eventual separation, both in language and customs, and finally in the emergence of different tribes. The Old Testament described the separation of languages and the peoples, and Chapter 15 of the Book of Genesis gave the example to it.

Thus, the conversion to agriculture was one of the factors for the creation of ethnic diversity, the environment was another. People, who lived on the northern edge of the Middle East, bordering the dry steppe, or on the southern edge, bordering the desert, had to turn to husbandry when their area become unsuitable for agriculture. The rainfall was insufficient for agriculture and they had no other, permanent source of water. The valleys of the rivers and wetter highlands were already settled and they had to make a living where they lived, on the steppe or in the desert.

The separation of the people into two separate communities, one agricultural and settled and the second cattle or sheep rearing, and nomad, had far reaching consequences. The Bible recorded that fact with an allegory, that of Cain and Abel, just as it recorded the separation of languages with the allegory of the Tower of Babel.

The Eurasian heartland is separated into two wide belts. The southern belt stretches from the Levant to China, through the Middle East and India. The northern belt is a drier steppe land, starting in the west in the Great Plains of Hungary and ending in Manchuria in the east. The steppes are bordered in the north by the permafrost of the taiga and in the south by great mountain ranges. The southern belt is bordered in the south by deserts and by some tropical lands, like Southern India and Southwest Asia.

Since the earliest of times, certainly after the ending of the last Ice Age, the changed climatic conditions compelled the hunter-gatherer groups to find new ways to secure their livelihood. The southern belt, which included the North African littoral and Western Europe too, has settled down to agriculture, adapting in each area to local conditions. Because of very special climatic conditions, Europe belonged to the moderate zone, although it was on the latitude of Canada. The settling down to agriculture was a long process, but eventually each area found the proper plants to cultivate, and the methods to do so.

They domesticated animals too, but as most of the arable lands were needed for agriculture, which provided their primary needs of subsistence, they domesticated animals of smaller size, like sheep, goats, pigs and fowls. Some of those animals were scavengers, but others needed pasture. Their general pattern of transhumance was, that the animals were driven for winter grazing to the highlands, which were unsuitable for agriculture, and they were led to the stubble of their grain fields in the summer, where the animals could graze and fertilize the land for the next sowing.

There might have been regional differences, but by and large, this was the pattern of life that developed in the southern belt during the millennia following the last Ice Age. They had agricultural communities, again with regional variations, some of them quite sizable, but no literate societies have developed. There was no need for them. They were, more or less, self-sufficient. They had grain from their fields, and protein from domestic animals, supplemented by fishing and hunting. They might not have been always peaceful, as there were always less fortunate wanting to redress their bad luck by taking from the more fortunate, or at least attempt to do so. It was probably a stable form of society, which might have remained so, if not for outside intervention. It seems that at the beginning, there was not much conflict because of low population density and sufficient land reserve. However, there was a second side of the picture and it made the change.

Those of the hunter-gatherer bands who lived on the dry steppe, north of the belt of agriculture, could not take to agriculture because their environment was unsuitable for it. As they had to make a living somehow, they went in for large-scale husbandry, domesticating mainly cattle. The economics of cattle breeding, and the problems of long-distance transhumance, caused that they domesticated other animals, like horses and camels, for riding and traction. As a corollary of their lifestyle they developed means of transports, like wagons for their oxen and chariots for their horses. Their mode of life, as it was shaped during the millennia following the last Ice Age, caused a number of developments, which became most important to the future life of humanity.

As their whole economy was depended upon cattle, it very soon became a form of wealth and not a commodity to trade and to use. It is still so with some African tribes in the Sudan and in East Africa. There the number of cattle an individual owns is the measure of his wealth. So it was with the original Euroasian cattle nomads too. The Latin word for money is pecunia. The root of this word is pecos, meaning cattle. They could not be self-sufficient. They had animal products but no grain, at least not in sufficient quantities. They had to rely on barter or trade, if they could or on robbery and raids on settled people, if they couldn't.

Their lifestyle made them very mobile, tough and warlike. The needs of long-range transhumance, with constant travels of hundreds of miles, and the need to safeguard their herds from human and animal predators, steered their bodies. In addition, they needed some form of transportation and carrying capabilities. The domestication of horses and the development of wagons, drawn by horses or oxen satisfied both needs. The use of the horses and wagons, changed into light chariots in warfare, was a small step.

The speed and the ferocity of the nomad fighters, equipped with means of transport and fighting, created an enemy that no settled community could withstand, at least until modern times. The population density of the cattle nomads was a small fraction of the density of people in the settled agricultural communities. Settled population and mainly vegetable diet, were a sure recipe for population explosion, which was probably a desirable development in times of plenty, with sufficient reserve of land, but a sure catastrophe when the climate turned against them, as it happened in many times.

The very existence of two belts of different lifestyles, one of agriculture and the second as husbandry, was sufficient to cause a conflict, even without the points of friction, as it was explained above. There were natural barriers, separating the two belts, but with enough gaps that from time immemorial served as gates of invasion from the north to the south. There were nomads in the southern deserts too, but they had limited influence, except in special circumstances. Since very early times, certainly earlier than historic times nomadic raiders constantly roved over agricultural lands, extracting booty and slaves, until at some time they reached an obvious decision. Instead of raiding the agricultural settlements and robbing them of their surplus, they decided to remain, enslave the population and enjoy the fruit of their work in situ. The extractions of the surplus took many forms, either as a tribute, or a tax, or even as a religious tithe.

The advent of urban civilizations was the direct result of the domination of the cattle-nomads over the settled, agricultural population. When the tactics of the cattle-nomads was to carry whatever they could and return home with the booty, they could not care whether they left anything for the survivors. When their tactics changed and they remained then they had to be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg.

Domination of one class, or one people, over another, means that there must be a surplus, otherwise there is nothing to extract. It is possible that reducing the needs of most of the people, i.e. by enslaving them, creates the surplus, but it is still a surplus. The existence of a dominating class, or people, in whatever form it may appear, has its primary needs to protect and to perpetuate the domination. The means to achieve it can be by the use of priesthood, clerks, administrators and enforcers. Filling those needs they had to create tools, which soon brought on literacy. It seems that the beginning of literal, urban civilizations, the shining point in humanity's past, was the direct result of the transfer of the expertise the cattle-nomads learned in controlling their cattle, to the control of human cattle.

In plain terms, it was the domestication of humanity. In numerical terms, as the number of the cattle-nomads was always a fraction of the number of the farmers, that domestication usually took the form of a thin veneer of armed aristocracy imposed upon the mass of people. In time, they even found Ideological justification for their rule. They protected the people against outside enemies, which was real enough, as the homeland of the cattle-nomads issued wave after wave of invaders, wishing to participate in the good life. Another method was to interpose themselves between the people and the gods; creating religion and priesthood.

It should be mentioned here that the domination of the people from one climatic belt over people from another climatic belt was not racial but environmental. At the beginning, most of the cattle-nomad raiders were Indo-Europeans, later replaced by Mongols and Turks. Neither the methods, nor the cruelty and ferocity by which they were employed, had any difference between the racial groups. The methods of the Mongol Ghengis-Khan and the Turkish Tamerlan were used by the Indo-European Scythians and Sarmatians three millennia earlier. The environment of the steppe was permanent, and it shaped whichever people was dominant.

Not only were the methods independent of racial origin, so were the methods of selecting the victims. Neither racial group had any consideration for the victims, least of all kinship and common origin. The original Indo-Europeans overwhelmed the native Europeans who certainly were of the same stock. The later developments were like a revolving door. The Romans overwhelmed the Thracians, Illyrians and Celts, then the Germans overwhelmed the Romans and finally the Scandinavian Vikings the Germans. It was all in the family, but it did not change anything. The Indo-European Aryans destroyed the Indus civilization in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. According to scholars earlier Indo-European invaders created that civilization. The Mongols of Ghengis-Khan destroyed other Mongol tribes, and Turkish Tamerlan defeated the Othman Turkish Bajazet at Manzikert. It was no racial enmity, but one of the have-nots against the haves. The fact that the haves of today were the have-nots of yesterday made no difference.

The world in which we live was shaped by that perennial conflict, and it goes on even in modern times. The descendants of the Celts, Iberians, Goths, Suebi, Vandals and Alans, who live in the Iberian Peninsula, continued the same expansion in South America. The descendants of the Celts, Belgae, Angles, Saxons, Danes and Norwegians, who settled in Great Britain, went on to America, Africa and Australasia. Similarly, the Indo-European Aryans went on from India to continue in Sri Lanka,

Cambodia and the Indonesian islands.

The immediate causes, the methods and the circumstances did have variations, but the aim was always identical: exploitation of new people and territory. So was the need to find higher justification. In the old times it was always a religious justification. The Indo-Europeans went to India with their priestly caste, the Brahmins, Ghengis Khan had his Shamans, even the Hungarians went to the Danubian basin following a white stag sent by a god to show them the way. Only in most modern times was there some modification. Modern Europeans entered Africa not only with soldiers and missionaries; they had doctors and colonial administrators too.

There were a number of reasons for their invincibility, apart of their being tough and warlike. They themselves were not organized; they were probably more like an uncontrolled rabble than an invasion force, but their opponents were even less so. Our minds is accustomed to maps, with colors denoting ethnic divisions, languages, possible religions, and certainly laws, taxes and enforcement. It is difficult to grasp that even in comparatively modern times, before the Westphalian Treaty of 1648, the concept of state was very different, even in western and central Europe. The reach of the power of the state was never longer than the reach of the soldiers of the king, and that was never very far.

The people in settled areas were tied to the land, which was their only livelihood; had no mobility, indeed they had no need for it, and not much experience in matters of war. In addition, they did not need the nomads. In prosperous years, they were self-sufficient in grain, vegetables, fruits, and protein, from their fields and the animals they kept. In lean years they had nothing to trade anyway.

The nomads, on the other hand, became completely different. They were not tied to one area, they were used to long-distance traveling when driving their herds from summer to winter pasture, and vice-versa. They were extremely tough; being outdoor most of the time, braving the elements and battling wild animals, and human rustlers. Most of all, they were experts in warfare, because of constant struggle against other nomadic tribes and sedentary people.^{[11](#)}

Until the advent of the gunpowder weapons, the mounted nomads were the uncontested masters of the world. It was true for any of the peoples who in turn were masters of the northern steppe areas, first the Indo-European tribes, then the Mongols and finally the Turks. No sedentary people could stand up to them, except perhaps those sedentary people, who were

themselves nomads and settled down as lords of the manor, as rulers of sedentary agricultural population. All European people, including Greeks and Romans, belonged to that category.

The nomads needed the farmers more than the farmers needed them. They had animals and animal products, but not much else. Above all, they needed grain and manufactured products. They had to trade to acquire those, or get them by force. More often than not, they have chosen the second option. Eventually they reached the obvious conclusion that it is better to lord over the farmers and enjoy the fruits of their work, than raiding them from time to time and carrying away the loot. Eventually they also convinced themselves that they perform a useful function by protecting the helpless farmers from other looters. Hence the birth of future military aristocracies. Still, others, Christians and Muslims, convinced themselves that they conquer for the propagation of the faith or for the extension of modern civilization.^{[12](#)}

It was an age-long conflict; in fact it shaped the picture of the world, including the present. The nomadic Indo-European tribes who in prehistoric times became rulers of Europe and part of Asia, continued to expand in classical times, and so did in modern times, until that expansion embraced the whole world. It was not solely an expansion of western civilization; the Iranian led expansion of Islam to the East was not less extensive. But the Iranians were also descendants of Indo-European cattle nomads.

The main reason beyond the expansion and colonization was loot and booty, some of them temporarily and some of them permanently. The expansion under the guise of spread of religion had the advantage that at least some of the subjects accepted that they being fleeced is part of the world order. After all, since time immemorial they were used of being relieved of part of their produce in the name of some divine instruction.

However, the nomadic cattle rearing tribes left us other heritages too, which are rather more than simple conquest and colonialism. Our world is full of customs, beliefs, institutions, and cultural symbols, which can directly be traced back to them.

One of the most important of those symbols is the trinity. It can be traced to their religious belief, that the Pantheon of their gods is led by a trinity of gods, where the god of the sky lords over the gods of the earth and the sea, and the god of the underworld, and over a coterie of lesser deities. Their social structure was also in the form of the trinity, the Priest, the Warrior and the Merchant/Craftsman. The common workers and farmers were

below society; they were supposed to be supplied by the conquered people, the Helots in Greece, the ryots in India, the coolies in China and the fellahin in the Middle East. But the Trinity conquered all European-based institutions, from the Christian churches, through the tripartite Hegelian philosophy: thesis, antithesis and synthesis, to the division of history itself: ancient, medieval and modern.

The Indo-European trinity-based social structure had an unfortunate outcome, which is still with us. The caste system of India, and other similar but lesser known systems, was directly based on an Aryan, Indo-European concept, which can be characterized by one Sanskrit word 'varna' It means caste, but it means color too.¹³ The connection is obvious. It is entirely possible, as many scholars claim, that there was more than one Indo-European invasion of India, among them that of the creators of the Harappa and Mohanjo-daro civilizations. The racial prejudices of the later Aryan invaders was not diminished by the knowledge that the people who were invaded were really their brothers, who either adapted themselves physically to the environment or mixed with the indigenous population. The same sense of color exists today too. It is sufficient to examine the marriage ads in modern Indian newspapers to see how deep is the color prejudice.

There are also other, friendlier, heritages. A horseman, alone on the steppe, is more individualistic than a farmer on his field. A farmer needs to have cooperation otherwise he cannot survive. First of all, he needs to have recognized boundaries so that his boundaries should be honored. A herdsman does not need cooperation. He is alone with his herd on the endless steppe. He has all the responsibilities and makes all the decisions. In simple terms, he is an individualist. As science is an individualistic enterprise; after all, ideas germinate in single minds, modern science is one of the better heritages of those murderous nomads.

There are other heritages too. Epic poetry is one of them. The poems of the Rigveda, the Avesta, the Homeric poems, the Edda, the Niebelungen Lied, and other countless epic poems are part of the inheritance. One can hear the memories of ancient storytellers from around pastoral campfires.

However, before the nomadic tribes, from the north and from the south, let themselves felt in the Fertile Crescent, the scene of this book, there is an important way station. After the first period of warmer weather, which started the melting of the ice cover of Europe, there were a number of climatic fluctuations. Each period with friendly climate saw a demographic explosion, which became an acute problem when the climate changed to the worse, and became hot and dry. At the beginning of the sixth millenium

BC., there was again an extended period of drought, which caused the people to move into the valleys of the rivers, which until then were marshy jungles, and mainly moved around a huge sweet-water lake, the Black Sea of today. The drought affected the nomads too, but much less than the sedentary people.

When a farmer abandons his land, because of drought or war, he becomes a refugee. He cannot take his land with him, not his equipment. He could take his personal belongings, sometimes not even that. It is so in modern times and it was worse in prehistoric times. (Remember the book, Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* about the refugees from the drought in Oklahoma. They had at least a Ford Model T. to carry their belongings.)

Pastoral nomads were more mobile. They were used to frequent relocations, between summer and winter pastures. They were organized; they had their riding animals, asses, camels or horses, their oxen-drawn wagons, and tents which could be dismantled, put on the wagons and move away in short time. When they experienced an extended drought in their area, they could pack and search for better pastures. They might have fought for it, but then they were used to it too.

When the waters of the Mediterranean broke through the natural dam of the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus, and filled a large area around the Black Sea with seawater, they flooded a densely populated territory and caused a tremendous destruction and killing. Most of the people must have been living near the water or near the rivers leading to the lake, the Don, Dnieper, Dniester and the Danube, etc. According to some calculation the water has risen about 6 inches per day, until after nearly a year they filled the basin of the Black Sea with seawater, raising the level of the sea by more than 150 meters. Most of the people around the sea must have perished in that flood. The rise of the water was so sudden that when they realized what is happening it was already too late.

It is known exactly when this catastrophe has happened. Numerous carbon isotope testing placed it at the middle of the sixth millennium, at around 5,518 BC. Those few who succeeded to escape scattered to all directions. There are some very interesting myths concerning the origin of peoples in the Middle East

Many of the ancient peoples in the south, pointed to the north, the direction of the Black Sea and the Caucasus. The Sumerians have certainly looked to the north as the homeland of their people. One of their epic poems is called "Emerkar and the Lord of Aratta".¹⁴ The poem shows a connection

between Sumer and some mythical town in the north, separated by seven mountain ranges. But there are more clues to their northern origin.

They had a language, which belongs to the Ural-Altai family of languages. It was the same family of languages that counted Finn and Hungarian among its members. St. Chad Boscawen, one of the earliest scholars of the Sumerian cuneiform¹⁵ found that in Sumerian language the same ideogram is used for country and for mountain, indicating that they originated in a mountainous country. They also had individual ideograms for wolf and deer, not known in Mesopotamia, and none for lion, tiger, and jackal, which do live there. Their composite ideogram for camel showed an animal with two humps, the Bactrian camel, common in Central Asia, but unknown in Mesopotamia. Even the place of worship was a manmade mountain on the level plain of Mesopotamia, the Ziggurat.

The Iranians also claimed that they came from the north. Excavations found the remains of an ancient Zoroastrian fire temple, near the cave towns of eastern Anatolia.¹⁶ Iranian myths claim that some of the people who came and settled in Sialk, moved on to Mesopotamia and northern Syria and eventually to Egypt.

There is another people living today in the territory of ancient Sumer, the Mandaeans, a Marsh Arab tribe. They are very specific about their origin. They claim that they came from a mythical location, named the Mountain of Madai, in Iranian Kurdistan, not far from Cappadocia. They also claim that before living in Kurdistan, they originated in Egypt. Indeed, they have some words in their vocabulary, which are undoubtedly of ancient Egyptian origin.¹⁷

These tales show and prove two major facts. The first is that there was a considerable amount of wandering around the Middle East in the period before the establishment of the urban civilizations. The second is that the idea of racial origins is meaningless in any scientific way. If the Mandaeans were indeed originated in the north, then they belong either to the Indo-Europeans, the Caucasians or the Ural-Altaians. If they lived in Egypt, as their vocabulary seems to show, then they are Hamitic. But now, they are Semitic Arabs, which only shows that racial belonging has a very changeable meaning.

Map 2 shows a possible ethnic composition of the Middle East at the time of the Patriarchs. It also shows the direction of possible intrusion of nomads, both from the north, the Indo-Europeans and the Caucasian, and

the Semitic from the south. The map intends to emphasize the fact that Indo-Europeans were living south of the Black Sea, and the Caucasus, and that there was also a continuing Indo-European incursion from the north through either the Caucasian Gate or the Balkans.

Before the discovery of the possibility of the Black Sea deluge in the 6th millenium BC, most scholars put the invasion of the Middle East by Indo-Europeans in the 4th millenium BC. Only Colin Renfrew¹⁸ and a few others put that date much earlier. Colin Renfrew was searching for the origin of European agriculture and found the clue to the ethnic composition of the Middle East.

According the hypothesis made feasible by the discovery of the Black Sea flood, that traumatic event has spread the survivors in all the directions of the compass. Some of the Indo-Europeans remained on the southern shore of the sea, they are therefore indigenous to the area. Other remained on the northern, European, shore, and they founded the Kurgan culture which was described by Marija Gimbutas. They eventually spread from there west to Europe, others, the Tocharians, east to Turkestan and China, and yet others south and south-east, to Armenia, Iran, Afghanistan and India. ¹⁹

So, according to Map 2 and the sources mentioned above, the Indo-Europeans were indigenous to the mountainous areas of the Middle East, in the upper tier of the Fertile Crescent and Anatolia, and they were also later intruders and conquerors. There is no contradiction in this statement. New waves of Indo-European nomads did not really bothered by the fact that their enemies were their kin, and nomads themselves a few generations before. One of the verses of the Rigveda warns the Aryans that they have to fight the dasyus – the aborigines, and be on the lookout on both side to watch for new waves of invaders who would stab them in the back. When barbarian tribes attacked the Roman Empire they had the same experience.

There is an Akkadian poem "The Kuthean legend of Naram-Sin", in which there is a description of a sweep of an invading horde, the Umman Manda, which started in eastern Anatolia, all the way to the Persian Gulf, and on to the direction of India. The Umman Manda is identified as one of the Indo-European tribes who passed Mesopotamia under way to India, and who made the terrible destruction on its way. ²⁰

It was probably not the first of such a sweep, and also not the last. The town of Scythopolis in Palestine probably received its name from a similar

raid which the Scythians did in the 1st millenium BC when they destroyed the last vestige of the Assyrian empire.

Thus, by the 3rd millenium BC., the Indo-Europeans were firmly established in the mountainous regions of the Middle East, and have spread out to other areas too. The Kassites who in the 2nd millenium BC played a major role in the destruction of Hamurabbi's empire, were already firmly settled in the mountains, east of Mesopotamia. Other tribes spread out into Syria and Canaan too. In order to simplify the treatment of this question, this book follows the example of the Bible. All Indo-European elements in the scene of the story, on Map 1, are called Hittite, whether they were indeed Hittite or some other related tribe.

Judging from the testimony of the Book of Genesis, and also from historical sources, the Hittites settled in the hill country, between Meggido in the north and Beer Sheba in the south. How did the Hittites reach Canaan, far from their homeland in the north? The road of Abraham to Canaan can probably be used as an example.

Abraham has decided to move to Canaan. His father started the journey, but he died on the way. It was a private undertaking. He might have done it under a divine instruction, or because of fear of war, or in search of better and less contested pastures. Judging from evidences in the Bible, Abraham must have been a man of substance. The Hittites of Hebron received him with full honor: "Hear us, my lord, thou art a mighty prince among us." (Gen. 23.6) When he wanted to free his nephew, Lot, from the Elamites, he could raise a private army of 318 men out of his retainers. In the circumstances of the 3rd millenium BC it was a substantial number. The armies with thousands and tens of thousands were still in the future. Even the great Sargon did not have more than 5000 men as his personal guard.

So, Abraham's journey was not official, but neither were the Hittites he encountered in Canaan officially there. They might have reached the place not as part of an advancing army but as individuals. The mighty Hittite empire was still in the future, they were on their own, as Abraham was. They already have settled down, when Abraham reached them. The Bible does not inform us what they were doing there, but judging what is known about them, they have already left the way of life of nomads.

When the Bible reported the conflict between the herders of Abraham and Lot, and they decided to separate in order to prevent unnecessary fights, it was done in a curious style: "And the land was not able to bear them, for

their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together. And there was a strife between the herdsmen of Abram's cattle and the herdsmen of Lot's cattle; and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land." (Gen. 13. 6 – 7)

The mention of the Canaanite and the Perizzite shows that they were there but had no part in the conflict, neither were the Hittite. It probably means that they were sedentary farmers, or lords of manor, who lorded over native serfs, having no herds of cattle which would compete with Abram's and Lot's cattle for pastures and water.

In the origin the Indo-European tribes were nomadic pastoralists. It was a kind of livelihood, imperfect though, as it could not supply all their needs, but it was much more than that. Cattle were a measure of wealth and importance, similar to what exists now in tribes of Sudan and East Africa. The Latin word for money is pecunia, whose root is the word pecos meaning cattle. Still, when the Latins reached Latium, they settled down and became sedentary farmers. The Hittites in Canaan might have experienced a similar transformation.

It seems that they reached Canaan the same way as Abraham and Lot, but settled down as lords of the manor, owners of estates worked by local serfs, exactly as other Indo-Europeans did since time immemorial. Hermann

Kulke wrote²¹ that when the Aryans conquered India, west of the river Ganda, there were many of the Aryans who escaped to the uncontrolled east. They preferred the more egalitarian organization of earlier times to the twain tutelage of the king and his Brahmin priests. They relied on their martial abilities to carve out estates and hold on to them. Similar

developments happened also with the Normans in the 11th century AD. who left Normandy for Sicily and Albania, far from the rule of Duke William. The Hittites of Canaan, and probably Abraham and Lot too, might have been similarly motivated.

What was the world Abraham and Lot found, when they reached Canaan. They certainly did not go to explore unknown lands. It is difficult to say from a distance of over 4,000 years but people did know the world and were in contact with each other. It might not be true for the simple people, the serfs, but it was certainly true for those of the higher classes as Abraham seemingly belonged to them. There was international trade, there were caravans, there was probably a near continuous warfare, or at least raids for loot. And last, but not least, at that time was the beginning of that kind of an international organization of rulers, who knew each other, exchanged

letters, gifts and ambassadors. ²²

It is assumed here, and in the Old Testament too, that there were Hittites in Canaan at the time of the Patriarchs, and they became sedentary farmers, or exploiters of native serfs. But the area of Ur – Harran, place where Abraham came from, was not Indo-European alone, it was Hurrian too.

It is known that Hurrians were in Canaan too. The Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem was a mixed Semitic-Hurrian tribe. One of their ruler, probably the last one, before Jerusalem was seized by David, was called Abdi-Heba, a name which was partly Semitic and partly Hurrian. Most of the scholars who are occupied with the question of the Hurrites, think that they were of Caucasian origin. Their language was certainly Caucasian, akin to Chechen, Lez and Georgian. They were the majority of the common people in Hatti and Mitanni, where the aristocracy was of Indo-European origin. Eventually, there was a further influx of Indo-Europeans, and the descendants of the Hurrians, called the Kurds today, are accepted as Indo-Europeans. ²³

According to this, the Hurrians were in subordinate position to the Hittites. Curiously, the Kurdish scholars who are searching for the identity of the Kurdish people do not think so. They see the relationship more as a friendly coexistence. There is important evidence to support this opinion.

The word Aryan means noble or freeman. The same meaning has the word Hurrian in Hebrew. The expression for a free man is bnei Horin, in direct translation the Sons of Hurrians. It is so in modern colloquial Hebrew and it was so used in the Old Testament. The expression appears there 13 times, always in the context of free man, or even as a noble (Nehemia, 5.7). Indeed, for the last two millennia every Jew says at the Passover feast, that their fathers were in bondage in Egypt, but now they are free. (Bnei Horin). If the origin of that expression is indeed Hurrian, then it is a powerful evidence and it certainly leaves open the possibility that the name Hittites, can cover not only Indo-Europeans but Hurrians as well.

Map 2 has one more important element. It is the Semites who have infiltrated the Middle East from their original homeland to the Arabian peninsula. They infiltrated Mesopotamia, Canaan and Syria. Eventually, they became the majority in all those countries. ²⁴

The area of Map 2 was, therefore, an ethnic kaleidoscope. Indo-Europeans and Hurrians in the north, Semites in Syria, Canaan, and Mesopotamia,

Iranians in the east and the Elamites , who were neither Semites nor Hurrians, but Dravidians, in the south-east. One should not forget the Sumerians too, who also came from the north after the Black Sea deluge. They created the Ubaid culture, out of which the first Mesopotamian civilization has evolved. At the time of the Patriarchs they were still there, but were in the process of completely overwhelmed by the Semites. In the story of the Patriarchs they have no role to play, except as builders of the city of Ur, if indeed Abraham has started his journey in Ur of Sumer.

There is one more element, which should not be forgotten. The ethnic groups mentioned above, were the rulers, who reaped the fruit of the work of the serfs, whose name changed according the area, but had one common characteristic. They were the indigenous people, who have scratched a living out of the land, were continuously fleeced by their native, or foreign, rulers, and their ethnic definition has constantly changed according their changing rulers.

Map 3 shows the possible ethnic division of Canaan during the time of the Patriarchs. The Canaanites, who were a north-Semitic people, probably separated into a number of tribal subdivisions, occupied the west, north and east of the country, and probably also to the east of the Jordan. The Hittites were occupying the central hill country, between Meggido in the north and Beer Sheba in the south. The Amalekites were living in the south of the country, on the border with the desert. They were a Semitic beduin tribe, much different from the north-Semitic Canaanites.

The last question at the beginning of this chapter concerned the cultural scene of the area and the period of the Patriarchs. The simplest and the most truthful answer is 'religion' and nothing else. It is certainly a correct answer but it deserves a further explanation. The centrality of religion does not mean that it was a backward society, On the contrary, it definitely was not. In Egypt, the building of the pyramids was in the distant past. In Mesopotamia, the great ziggurats were also built a long way in the past. They were even in use, what cannot be said of the pyramids of Egypt.

They had agriculture, husbandry, mining, industry and commerce. They had, of course, wars and weapons development. There were international relations and commerce. Indeed, they had everything what any society has, adjusted to the general level of technology. Those, who had, the ruling elite, had a good life. Those, who had not, managed as best as they could; some better, some worse. Just like modern times.

There was, however, one glaring difference what separated them from our

concept of society. People were and still looking for answers to the main questions of life. In our modern world, there are many sources for answers; science, art, ideology and politics. Admittedly, religion is still one the sources; powerful in some parts of the world, much less so in others. In the period, which is discussed here, religion had no competition; there was no alternative.

Thinking about religion in the context of the modern western world, one relates to belief, morality, and a certain standard of behavior. One might even think that religion is extremely important, if one belongs to one of the fundamentalist denominations, but even the most extreme western person would not associate religion with politics, law, economy and every other facet of daily life.

The attitude of non-western peoples is different. It is certainly true for Muslims but for others too. For them, religion is a central column, which holds up the whole edifice of their existence. Religion is the only law they know, and accept. Economy, education and politics, to count only a few, are parts of religion. If bank, then it should be an Islamic bank and so on.

These examples were brought here neither to denigrate nor to praise. They are facts of life, having very long roots going back at least to the period which is under consideration here, or even before. Western liberal way of life seems to be an exception, although a dominant one, and the rest of the world has remained much nearer to ancient sources.

The centrality of religion, at the period of the Patriarchs, did not belong solely to the peoples of the Middle East; it was universal. Fustel de Coulanges, made a study on the origin of the social and religious aspects of Indo-European societies. It was mainly about those of Greece and Rome, although he used India too for illustration. Coulanges claimed that the centrality of religion originated in the ancient cradle of that civilization, somewhere in Central Asia, and it has changed and adapted by various degrees to the different countries, they migrated to. In the West, it reached the level of social clubs, apart of having seemingly eternal symbols; in the East, like in India, it retained its near complete centrality.^{[25](#)}

Centrality of religion meant in ancient times, that the law belonged to one people, as it was part of the religion. The law belonged only to those who were part of the religion. No one could leave his religion, as it meant that he left his people, and remained without law, friendless and powerless in a strange world. That was the reason why in the classical world, exile was the strongest punishment a citizen could receive, apart of the death penalty.

The law was, therefore, part of the religion and part of a national and ethnic belonging. There was no concept of universal law as there were no universal people. The 10 Commandments were part of the Jewish law and they applied to Jewish people alone. The same was true to the laws of Hamurabbi and Solon. The first belonged to Babylonians and the second to Athenians.

The centrality of religion remained in force everywhere, at least, until the fall of the classical world. They had nothing else, apart of religion. Laws applied to people within one religion. In Rome they had a magistrate called praetor peregrinus who had to adjudicate conflicts between strangers, living in Rome, and between strangers and Romans. He could to rely only on commonsense, as Roman laws were not applicable to strangers. When two peoples went to war, it was a war between their gods. Even in historical times, conquest of a territory by Rome ended when the gods of the defeated people were transferred to Rome and housed honorably in a temple.

One cannot be surprised about that centrality in the period of this book. It was more than 4,000 years ago; life was difficult, unpredictable and cruel. Apart of those fortunate few who were on top, life was a Hobbesian jungle. What possible defense could the people have and what possible explanation could they give to the happenings?

If suddenly, the water in a lake, near which people were living since time immemorial, turns from sweet to salty water and starts to rise 6 inches a day, ruining and drowning everything, what explanation could anyone give then to such an event? What explanation could anyone give today to such an event? Or, how people could adjust to the period of the Younger Dryas, when it suddenly turned cold and unfriendly, with starving families because the crops were ruined by the bad weather? It went on so for nearly a thousand years. We are talking about historical, or even geological, times and a thousand years does not seem to be too long. But a thousand years is about 50 generations. Did the people at that time thought of the time before their current nasty existence, as the lost Paradise and search for the reason they were expelled from it? Could anyone at that time know the correct answer? More important, did anyone at that time have the mental capability to understand, if someone would have told them?

If everything was unpredictable, the only possible defenses were the gods. If things went bad, as they usually did, the gods did not help because they were offended by some transgressions. No one could have predicted that the water of the lake will start rising 6 inches a day and turn from sweet to

salt water. It must have been the wrath of god, and that is how it is written in the Old Testament.

If the gods alone had the power to inflict or deflect natural catastrophes, then they must be served at all times, with prayers, sacrifices and taxes. It explains the great power organized religion had in all civilizations at all times. They were the go-betweens to the gods. The head of the state religion in Rome was called Pontifex Maximus – meaning the chief bridge builder; the bridge being between gods and men.

Priests were not solely tithe collectors. There are many Mesopotamian myths, which claim that the first cult places and their priestly personnel emerged as a therapeutic institution for beclouded people in need of counseling, after natural disasters inflicted destruction on their habitat.²⁶ The temples received tributes from the peasants in exchange for a source of healing (or salvation) by the eliminations of panic and anger through sacrificial release of catastrophe-inflicted aggression. Between the catastrophes, the priests also functioned as prognosticators of the next disaster.

According to modern psychology, advise reaction in adults after some traumatic experience can be so severe that disaster victims pass their fear and insecurity to their children. Even to children yet to be born. This past experience replaces the child's sense of a secure world with a fearful worldview. This syndrome is well known to the second generation of Holocaust survivors. In addition, it is well known that there is a direct correlation between disasters and armed conflict. The conflicts are not caused by the disasters. They are caused by the fear of scarcity resulting from unpredictable repeat of the catastrophe. As the priests were the experts in avoiding catastrophes, they had unprecedented power. They also filled the place of modern psychiatric treatment.

It is no wonder that the names of people were theophoric, meaning that the name of the god chosen by the man to protect him, was part of his name. So when a citizen of a city state in northern Syria at the time of the Patriarchs, has changed his name from En-na-ni-Il – Il should have mercy on me to En-na-ni-Ya – Ya should have mercy on me it was an extremely important decision. The wearer of the name knew that both Il and Ya were powerful deities, but for some reason he decided that Ya was more powerful than Il in his protection, and moreover Ya will protect him even from Il, if that one will take umbrage at his desertion.

This particular decision, the changes in the theophoric names is probably

connected to the age of the Patriarchs. It certainly has a reflection in the Book of Genesis, between the J – Jahvist and E – Elohist sources. One can add that the use of theophoric names is common to this day, albeit without the potential conflict embedded in them. The use of theophoric names is not a religious expression today, just as the use of the word Friday, for example, does not make one the worshiper of the goddess Freia. These names are relics of time immemorial and possibly will be with us for a long time to come. However, when they were first coined, they must have had an explosive nature. We know of the religious wars in Europe of the 16th and 17th centuries, and they were bad enough. It is possible that the change of theophoric names generated similar passions.

When did this change occur and how it is related to the age of the Patriarchs? The city of Ebla, where a large archive of clay tablets was found, had a short-lived existence as a major power. There were 5 kings only in the list of kings of that city, in its particular existence. The fourth of the kings in that list was named Ebrum, Ebrium, or Ibrium.²⁷ Ebrum was put on the throne by King Sargon I of Akkad. Eventually Ebla revolted against Akkad, occupied its cities for a short while, but was destroyed finally by Naram-Sin, the grandson of Sargon. It seems, that under the rule of Ebrum, there was a religious revolution in that northern Syrian town, which was one the northern outpost of the Semites. The visible sign of that reform was the change of –El or Il in the theophoric parts of the names to –Ya. What exactly signified that change?

El or Il was the name of the chief Semitic God. The name Ya(h) or Yahu (Iahu) have diverse roots, one of them of Indo-European origin, the other is Egyptian and yet another shows some Sumerian connection. The widespread use of the variation of the name makes it a distinct possibility that it has originated in that misty past before physical separation of peoples created separate and mutually unintelligible languages.

Robert Graves, the expert of Mediterranean mythology put the name Iahu into Egypt of the 3rd millenium BC., as one of the titles of Set, and also of Horus. He also recorded that Iacchus, the Cretan counterpart of Dionysius, was derived from the root, as was Iahu-bel in Canaan.²⁸ In Sumer, Iahu was one of the titles of the Moon Goddess, who had a temple in Harran as well.

The second possible origin of the name is a proto-Indo-European god of Yayash, Yah or Yave, a protective god whose symbol was a tree. It has been dated back to 2900 BC to the Indus Valley civilization.

In the context of the Old Testament, Yahweh seems to be a sky god – a god of thunder and lightning. He was associated with mountains. The manifestations of Yahweh were often connected with fire, as at Mount Sinai and the burning bush. That was the reason that Sigmund Freud characterized Yahweh as a volcano god.²⁹ In the context of Egypt and Sinai, it is not a realistic characterization, as those areas have no volcanic activity. So, the characterization is possible only if it is associated either with the Arab peninsula, or with northern Mesopotamia. According the Ebla tables, the connection might have originated there.

Is it possible that Ebrum or Ebrium or Ibrium of Ebla was the same as Eber of the Old Testament, and so directly connected to the patriarchal stories? It is a possibility but it is a wild hypothesis. It is also a possibility that Ebla accepted the Syrian deity Iahu-bel as its chief patron with some change in the name. There is, of course, another possibility too. Abraham has visited Egypt. He accepted the circumcision as an outward sign of the Covenant. Circumcision was a specific Egyptian custom. At that time no peoples apart of the Egyptians used it. Iahu was one of the names of Horus. The unifiers of Egypt called themselves the Followers of Horus and the coastal road connecting Egypt and Canaan was called The Road of Horus, meaning that Horus had some Canaanite or Asian connection. It is possible that together with the circumcision, Abraham has accepted Horus too, under its Iahu name. But, there is another possibility that seems to be the most feasible.

Ebla, whose main god was Yah, a shortened version of Yahweh, after the reforms of Ebrum, was on the northern border of the Semitic world. Their northern neighbors were the Hittites and the Hurrians, and they might have influenced Ebla. It is also possible, that Ebrum knew well that eventually Ebla will come into conflict with Akkad and attempted to organize possible alliances. Accepting Yah from the Indo-European Pantheon as its chief deity, might have been an attempt to ensure their sympathy. Judging from the results, it was insufficient.

However, it was a case of Ebla and not of Abraham. If Abraham was the originator of the religious reform that received its expression in the use of Yahweh in the Book of Genesis, then he might have received the inspiration from the familiar name, if he was a Hittite or a Hurrian from Ur of Kasdim, north of Harran. If not from there, then it was an inspiration from his Egyptian journey, together with the circumcision. Judging from the format of the word, it is more likely that the Indo-European form served as his inspiration, because the word was written as Yahweh, once even as Ya (Exodus 15.2) and not as Iahu. That form is used only as the theophoric

part of names and not a stand-alone word.

This is the religious aspect of the age of the Patriarchs. It will return in later chapters too, as it is not possible to touch that period without being involved in religion.

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THE PATRIARCHS



From the Garden of Eden to the Flood



This chapter has a unique standing in the study. The aim of the book is to establish a historical proof to the best known mythological story, that of the Patriarchs in the Book of Genesis. This chapter is part of that task, with a slight difference. The proof about the existence and the acts of the patriarchs is to find some parallel evidence that can establish a pattern of actions and conditions that were common in their assumed period. In the case of the patriarchs there is a basic assumption that their period was already in historical times, sometimes in the last quarter of the 3rd millenium BC. In the conditions of the Middle East, that was already a literate period; numerous state archives were found and there is quite a comprehensive picture about the relations, and the way of life of that era.

The period in which the mythical tales of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis were played out was before the historical era. The mythical tales are involving a story of a single family. According the Bible, they were the first humans, but it does not detract from the fact that the first humans were a single family. As with other chapters of the study, the Book of Genesis has two types of narratives; that of a theological nature and that of a historical nature. It is the same with the tales of this part of the study. There are the theological parts, about the creation of the world and the first man and woman, the original sin and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the murder of a brother by another, the sin of the people which caused the deluge and the end of the deluge.

The treatment of this chapter is different from the others. Here, there is a purely mythological tale, with a slight difference. It leaves a veritable trail of clues, which can be examined and followed. In this respect, these stories are different from the usual myths. The major clues of the stories point to the:








geographical location of the Garden of Eden

-  the place where Cain went into exile after killing his brother
-  The mountain where the ark landed after the deluge

In addition, a reliable picture can be formulated about the conditions in the Garden of Eden, before the expulsion from there, and about the conditions after the expulsion. Conditions do not mean here the theological, but a real, historical, circumstance.

If we wish to state the questions set by the first 9 chapters of the Book of Genesis, then they should be stated and answered in the following, chronological, order:

-  Where was the Garden of Eden?
-  What were the conditions before and after the expulsion from the Garden?
-  Where was Cain's place of exile?
-  Where and when was the Deluge?
-  Where was the dispersion of the survivors from the Deluge?

Here are the answers to the questions. They are not scientific proofs, but they are the best what can be done according the present state of knowledge. As it will be seen at the end of this chapter, the questions received realistic, and feasible, answers.

Where was the Garden of Eden?

The Old Testament provides the following clues (Gen. 2. 10-14):

"And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it was parted, and became with four heads. The name of the first is Pison; that which compasseth the whole land of Havilah; where there is gold and the gold of the land is good; there is bdellium and onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon; the same that encompasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel; that is it, which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates".

In these few lines there are a number of real clues and a number of mistranslations or misunderstandings. One of the mistranslations is that of Ethiopia. In the original Hebrew it is written "the land of Cush" which can be the land of the Negroes, but not necessarily so. The real clues are the names of the two of the four rivers which are mentioned, that of the

Hiddekel, which is the Tigris, and the Euphrates.

These two rivers emerge in Armenia and flow in the general direction of the Persian Gulf. The other two, Pison and Gihon, raise many questions, especially the Gihon which circles Ethiopia, which recalls the Nile, and the Pison which is around the land of Havilah and the gold mines. According to the Book of Genesis 25.16 Havilah was in the direction of Egypt. So the mention of these rivers, and their associations, confused the scholars who attempted to locate the Garden of Eden. The association with Egypt and Ethiopia even induced one scholar to locate it at the southern extremity of the two rivers, where they unite into the Shatt-el-Arab. The Shatt-el-Arab has two more rivers flowing into it; one is the Karun, which originates in Iran and flows directly into the Persian Gulf, but in prehistoric times it joined the Shatt-el-Arab, because the Persian Gulf was much smaller in those days. The fourth river does not exist today, but in prehistoric times it was a river that flowed through northern Arabia and now it is a dry bed. It is called Wadi Rimah in Saudi Arabia and Wadi Batin in Kuwait¹

However, the decision to place the Garden of Eden in southern Mesopotamia, directly contradicts the main clues of the Old Testament, which even describes the Tigris as turning to the east, toward Assyria.

When one looks on Map 4, one immediately sees that there is one location where there are more than 4 rivers to choose from. The main question is which two rivers correspond to the Gihon and Pison. There are two rivers that flow to the south, the Tigris and Euphrates, one to the west, the Halys and three to the east, the Kura, the Aras, and the Uizon. But which are the Pison and the Gihon, the gold mines of Havilah and the land of Cush (Ethiopia).

It is assumed that whoever wrote that part of the Old Testament, had no intention to write a fairy tale, but something that was recognizable to everyone familiar with that area. There is no doubt that anybody in ancient times could have pointed out without difficulty the exact location of the Garden of Eden, which was in the north, somewhere in the vicinity of the watershed, which is the complex of the Ararat, which had later an important role to play. We lack the knowledge of the ancients and we need to search for the missing details.

The first answer to the riddle concerns the river Aras, which in Greek times was named Araxis. It flows east from the watershed to the Caspian Sea. However, when the area was occupied by the Muslim expansion, Arab historians named that river as the Gaihun, which is the Gihon in Arabic

transliteration.^{[2](#)}

As for the fourth river, there are two possibilities. The first is that of the Kura which also flows to the Caspian Sea, somewhat north of the Aras/Gaihun. The second is a smaller stream, originating somewhat east of Lake Urmia and flowing into the southern end of the Caspian. That river is called today the Unzon or Uizon, which can be a transliteration of the Pison.

If the Uizon is indeed the Pison, then it flows east of Eden to water the Garden of Eden. Superimposing these definitions on to a modern map, then east of the Lake of Urmia there is the valley of Tabriz, with the Uizon flowing through it. East of Tabriz there is a place, called today Meydan-e Shah or the Garden of the Shah. If one travels north of Tabriz, from the original Eden toward the river Gihon/Aras, one passes a high mountain with a very high peak. That mountain is called today the Cushedag, or the Mountain of Cush.^{[3](#)} And the valley of the river Uizon/Pison has excellent ancient evidence for gold deposits in that region.^{[4](#)}

According to the above, the location of the original Garden of Eden can be found by using the clues of the Old Testament. It is east of the Valley of Tabriz, near the headwaters of the Tigris, Euphrates and the Aras/Gihon. North of Tabriz, there is a mountain pass called Cushedag, Mountain of Cush, and east of Tabriz there is the Meydan-e Shah, the Garden of the King, watered by the Uizon/Pison, which is the land of Havilah with the ancient gold mines.

The valley of Tabriz, the capital of Iranian Azerbaidjan, is a heavily industrialized area now. However, even now it has its orchards, especially on the higher terraces of the valley. As one goes up on the mountains, surrounding the valley, one finds the bigger trees, the cedars and the oaks. In ancient times, without the blight of industrial grime, it must have been a paradise, the Garden of Eden or Meydan-e Shah.

Conditions before and after the Expulsion from the Garden of Eden

The Old Testament commented on the conditions of the stay in the Garden of Eden, before the expulsion:

"Of every tree in the garden, thou mayest freely eat." (Gen. 2.16)

and after the Fall:

"...cursed is the land for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return to the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen.3.17-20).

Without commenting on the theological implications of the few lines quoted above, the first quotation describes the life before the Fall and the second after it. The first quote is probably a good description of the life hunter-gatherer groups had before the end of the last Ice Age, and the second describes the life after the onset of the Neolithic Revolution

Conditions in the Middle East and North Africa were generally favorable during the years of the last Ice Age. The deserts of today, the Sahara, the Lybian, Arabian, Syrian and the Thar in western India, had large territories which were grasslands, suitable for hunter-gatherer peoples. The mountains of the Sahara were forested, large lakes filled the depressions and great rivers were flowing. Among them the dry riverbeds of Arabia, what some scholars thought to be one of the rivers of the Garden of Eden.^{[5](#)}

The real Garden of Eden was in the mountains of Armenia, which is today the valley of Tabriz. The Persians called it in historical times, the Meydan-e Shah – the garden of the Shah. If in historical times it was deemed to be suitable for the Shah, in prehistoric times, before the Neolithic Revolution, it must have been extremely beautiful and fruitful. Apart of the beauty, there were other advantages too. There were wide areas full of wild grasses, of which the later wheat and barley was developed. Among the grasses were the varieties of the emmer and the einkorn. Agricultural experts think that a hunter-gatherer band could collect in 10 –15 days sufficient quantities of grain to last a whole year. If Paradise is measured by the effort one has to work for his living, then it was Paradise indeed.

The life of those who lived in Europe was more difficult. The glaciers reached the Alps. People scratched a precarious existence out of the frozen environment with great difficulty. They had berries from the forests and they could hunt the great animals of the north.

With the retreat of the glaciers the conditions of life was reversed on both sides of the Mediterranean. The life of those living in the north became much more comfortable. Weather became milder and game more numerous, because the milder weather improved their pastures. New herds from the south joined those animals already roaming the northern pastures,

as they could not find sufficient food in the desiccating south.^{[6](#)}

Contrary to Europe, life in the Middle East and North Africa became grim indeed. Those were the areas that suffered most from the climatic catastrophe; they had very few choices, none of them very good.

There were some that followed the herds of animals, south or north. Others descended to the wet jungle swamps in the river valleys, or they could remain where they were. All the choices, apart of remaining, had to cause heavy conflicts with those who already were living there. Even prehistoric men did not look kindly upon those who intruded on their livelihood. They might not have known the word 'immigrant' but the sentiment was already there.

It must have been a terrible time for those who lived in the previously bountiful south and who became gradually impoverished. It was a terrible punishment from an unknown deity for some crime which nobody could remember committing. It is probably no coincidence that two masterpieces of innocent sufferings originated in that part of the world. One of them was the Book of Job, and the second, its fit companion, the tale of the lost paradise.

Modern science has proven the truth in the words of the Old Testament, saying that the land will bring forth thistles and thorns, but not food. Archaeological excavations found that in the period, when roving hunter-gatherer bands have shifted from eating large mammals, which escaped either north or south, to eating smaller animals and more vegetables and grains, the size of the human skeleton has shrunk. Male skeletons were shorter by 4 centimeters in the average, and female skeletons by 5 centimeters. Life expectancy was considerably reduced and skeletons, which were excavated from that period, exhibited many instances of nutritionally based, and infectious, diseases.^{[7](#)}

If conditions of life were really so good before the Neolithic Revolution, especially in such special places, like the Garden of Eden, the Meydan-e Shah, probably was, the contract between the good life before and its bitter continuation, after, must have been especially acute. However, a warning should be sounded here. The climatic change must have been a very long and drawn-out process. When we look back, from a distance of ten millennia, we can see the contrast. If the length of the transition was in centuries or in millennia, the question could arise whether people could remember and compare from such a distance.

It is clear that in modern times such an extended memory would be unthinkable, but then in modern world we are overwhelmed by information, that nothing could remain even for much shorter period. But even for ancient times the distance must have been too large to contrast the good life before the Fall with a bleak present. The event that is recorded in the Old Testament, as the Fall or Expulsion, must have been some very strong and extreme natural event in order to remember it after a long time.

It is assumed that the Garden of Eden was somewhere between the Lake Urmia and the Caspian Sea, along the river Pison. It is not only the territory of the Garden of Eden, it is also the territory of Aratta, the mythical hometown of the Sumerians. It is an area with complex geological structure. Lake Urmia is a dead and salty lake, with a volcanic island in the center of the lake. The whole area is prone for earthquakes, then and in the present. The lifeless water of Lake Urmia reminds one of another lifeless lake, the Dead Sea in Canaan, which is also the center of earthquakes. It must have been some earthquake related catastrophe which connected the memory of before and after in the memory of people.

In ancient times, the tempo of life was much slower, and there were fewer pressures of data than today. In addition, they had methods of preserving memories, a knack that has been lost for us. But, there must have been some extreme condition in the transit to catch the imagination and anchor the memory. Judging from the nature of the territory, it must have been some earthquake with extraordinary consequences, probably relating to Lake Urmia.

One of the methods of conserving memories was the storyteller, who told mythological tales through many generations, without losing anything from the stories. Probably all the major epic tales of the ancient world, the epic poems of Homer, the Rig-Veda, the Avesta and the Old Testament too, were transmitted orally before written down. It is a form of expertise that could not survive modern life.

The second method of saving ancient memories is to incorporate them into religious holidays. So Christians saved their religious memories in the holidays of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. So did the Jews who went much further in saving their national heritage through holidays and rituals. The memory of the Pessach feast goes back more than 3000 years, and they have many holidays, which go back over two millennia.

It is entirely possible that the memory of the Expulsion from the Garden of

Eden was kept alive by some ways. There were minstrel tales like the Gilgamesh Epos, or religious festival, but when the contents of the Old Testament were finalized, it was such an old story that they were mentioned only together with the mythological tale of Creation.

Where was Cain exiled?

The story of Cain and Abel is a direct continuation of the transition from a prosperous hunter-gatherer existence to agriculture and husbandry. The truth is that there is no agriculture and husbandry; the proper expression is agriculture or husbandry, and the choice between the two is not voluntary.

When husbandry is mentioned here, the meaning is husbandry in the original sense of the word, that is large herds of animals, cattle, sheep, goats, etc. driven by cattlemen or shepherds between summer and winter pastures. The people who work with the animals are constantly on the move, like their animals. If a farmer has a few cattle and a number of sheep, it is not husbandry in the proper sense. Husbandry is a way of life, just as agriculture is.

The environment makes the historical choice between agriculture and husbandry. Areas where the environment is suitable for agriculture have no large herds. Territories, like the wide belt of steppe land between the line of the Danube in Hungary and Beijing in China, or the southern deserts, from the Sahara to the Thar desert in India, did not have agriculture because the environment was not suitable.

The biblical story of Cain and Abel is a stylized version of the age-old conflict between people of the sown and the nomads. There is always a fringe area between the two and there is always an undeclared war between the farmers and the bedouin. This is especially true for the Middle East, but it is also true for the Chinese and the Mongols in China, and between the Slavic farmers and Turkish nomads in the steppe land north of the Black Sea. That there is a permanent conflict between the two, disregarding their identity, shows that the conflict is part of their existence and does not depend on their race or culture.

Cain was a farmer, while Abel, the murdered brother, was a husbandman. The judgment of the murderer by God was reasonable and even lenient.

"And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the

earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken upon him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him." (Gen. 4. 13-15)

So Cain was pardoned in fact. He did not become a fugitive and a vagabond, but settled down in the land of Nod; had children and built a city that he named after his son, Enoch. Among his descendants was Tubal-Cain, probably the only person in the Old Testament who had a hyphenated name. The Old Testament wrote:

"And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron." (Gen.4.22)

It is an interesting sentence. Zillah had another son, called Yuval, who was the father of all who handled the harp and the organ. Yuval did not have the suffix –Cain in his name. The fact that Tubal-Cain had a hyphenated name can be probably explained by the fact that he was a smith. It seems that in prehistoric, or even in historic, times smiths did not belong to any specific tribe or settled village, but to some sort of inter-tribal trade union. Probably, each of them bore the 'mark of Cain' to announce that the stranger is not an enemy to be slain on sight, but the bearer of things useful and necessary to everyone.

In primitive societies, the security of any person was safeguarded by the possibility of a blood feud between the clans of the killer and the killed. It must have been a necessity to mark all those who were outside the clans, to keep them alive.⁸

The story of the exile of Cain to the land of Nod, has an interesting byproduct which strengthens the choice of the valley of Tabriz and the Meydan-e Shah as the location of the Garden of Eden.

Cain was exiled to the land of Nod, to the east of Eden. Nod means in Hebrew wanderer and probably from that name came the story that Cain became a wanderer and could not remain at one place, because of his sin. However, according the Bible, Cain remained settled, as is normal for a farmer, he even built a city, which he named after his son, Enoch.

David Rohl⁹ who made a survey of the valley of Tabriz and found the Garden of the Shah, the rivers Gihon and Pison, the Mountain of Cush and the gold mines of Havilah, went according the instructions of the Bible. He

went from Tabriz to the east until he reached the town of Ardabil, known from the earthquakes around it. He found that all around Ardabil, there are villages, all called with a different version of Nod-I (Belonging to Nod), like Lower-Nod-i and Upper-Nod-i. According to him, he found the Land of Nod, as it was described in of the Bible.

In order to be absolute sure of his findings, he went to the mapping center of the Iranian Government to look up the official maps. He found on the map the same names.

So, the names of the villages confirm the biblical story. We should, however, be very careful in deciding what it confirms. It does not confirm the biblical story of creation, the expulsion and the strife between Cain and Abel. What it found was that the geographical clues of the story of an extended family were indeed correct, as they were affirmed by facts on the ground from a distance of many millennia. The correctness of the geographical clues does not mean that the whole story is correct.

The Deluge

According the Old Testament, the deluge was a punishment for the sins of the people. Noah and his family were saved because of their righteousness. The decision was made by these words:

"And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord." (Gen. 6. 7-8)

But not only Noah and family were saved. So were Ziu-Sudra from Chaldea, Utnapishtim of the Assyrians, Atrahasis of the Sumerians, Manu of the Indians, Deucalion, Perseus, Megaros, Alakos, and others of the Greeks¹⁰ and many others whose name was lost in the millennia since then.

The world has about 500 legends of floods that nearly destroyed humanity, having left only a few individuals to restart humanity. Most of those legends have a common pattern.¹¹

1. Man is guilty of transgression against God (or gods)
2. God (or one of many gods) sends a flood to punish man.
3. Before the flood, instructions are sent to a selected individual to build an ark.

4. The instructions cater for the survival of all species, and the family of the individual.
5. The flood destroys the old race.
6. After the flood, a new God-fearing race emerges to populate the earth.

There must be a reason for the multitude of the similar stories. From the common elements, God's wrath as the primary cause can be disregarded. In early times, everything was connected to God, especially unexpected natural catastrophes. Some of the reasons are listed below:

Floods are natural disasters, happening in every part of the world. However, not every flood has biblical proportions, most of them are locals. The great majority of tales to one of those local deluges.

The end of the last Ice Age caused melting of the glaciers, which raised the level of the seas by hundreds of feet. It must have caused a near universal destruction, which must have impinged on the collective memory of mankind. The many similar tales are collective memories of that disaster. There was no universal destruction, but there were a few regional catastrophes. Copying of tales from one people to another explains why there are so many similar tales. According to this theory, the story of Noah was copied from Utnapishtim, that from Ziusudra, and so on. ¹³ . After the deluge, the same blood type appears for people in predynastic Egypt and the Ubaid culture people in Mesopotamia. They could have received the genes controlling the blood types only by exogamous marriages.

The basic cause of the Black Sea deluge was that the level of the seas rose because of the melting of the glaciers. The level of the seas became much higher than the level of the Euxine Lake, as it was a landlocked lake. Eventually, either the pressure of the water from the Mediterranean, or an earthquake, removed the natural dam of the Bosphorus. The area of northwestern Anatolia is prone for earthquakes, so it is possible that it was an earthquake that cleared the plug out of the Bosphorus. Because of the drought, there were many people around the lake, and along the rivers leading to it, and undoubtedly many of them perished there. The survivors spread out to all directions of the compass, to Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, Sumer and the steppe lands north of the Black Sea, and from there to Europe, Central Asia, India and probably to Chinese Turkestan too.

The tales that originated from all those people, who escaped the flood, were similar. The similarities were caused not because they copied from one to another, but because they came from people who had identical experiences. There is, however, one discrepancy between the biblical tale and the facts.

The Old Testament tells a tale about a rain of forty days and nights, but the actual deluge was a waterfall, which poured water into the Euxine Lake during two years, until the level of the lake was raised to the level of the Mediterranean. Still, there is no discrepancy here.

Map 5 shows the map of the present Black Sea. According the map, the sea has a low shore in the Balkans and Russia, and mountains in Anatolia and the Caucasus. The map shows the depths of the sea. The lowest part of the sea, up to 500 meters in depth is in the north and the west. Part of this area is the one, which was inundated by the deluge. According to the map, if somebody lived on the north shore of the lake, he had a long distance to travel before reaching safety. If someone lived near the present south shore, he had only a short distance to travel. So, if Noah and family lived near the southeastern corner of the lake, which was nearest to their former home in the valley of Tabriz, then he certainly could reach the Ararat, which was a safe area. However, he might have experienced a continuous heavy rain. The rain was caused by the way the basin of the sea was filled. According to a current newspaper article¹⁴ writing about an expedition which intends to explore the old shores of the Euxine Lake, the water rushed into the basin with the force and quantity of about 1000 times that of the Niagara Falls.

According to the article, the noise of the waterfall was heard in a 100-mile radius. The spray that rose from the waterfall into the air must have been tremendous, and there is no doubt that there was a heavy rainfall during the period the Black Sea was filling up. There is a waterfall in Africa, much bigger than the Niagara Falls; the Victoria Falls; it is between Zambia and Zimbabwe. The name of the waterfall in the local African language, is Mosi-o-Tunya – the smoke that roars. The spray of water, which is the smoke, can be seen from miles away, and the roar of the waterfall can be heard from about 15 miles. There is no doubt that it must have been an extremely frightening experience, which definitely has left its sign in the tales of the deluge. Can anyone doubt that such a frightening experience was taken as a sign of heavenly wrath? Would it be taken differently even today?

Tests which were recently made on the sediments of the Dead Sea confirmed that the years of the deluge were especially wet years, probably the wettest in the whole prehistoric era. This means that the rains caused by the deluge were spread in a very wide radius,

There are a few comments about the transformation of the Euxine Lake into the Black Sea as described by the stories of the Bible and others about

the Deluge.

All the stories tell of very few survivors; usually no more than one person or one family. It is a reasonable assumption if one looks at the map of the Black Sea. (See Map 5). It has a low shoreline in the north and west of the sea, and a mountainous shore in the east and south. It means that the water covered a larger territory each day on the north and west, and less in the south and east. However, the southern shore of the Black Sea has a seamount, which can be clearly seen as a finger pointing from the southeast to the northwest. That seamount was a long string of hills, forming a peninsula in the lake. That seamount must have been a death trap. People, who lived there, 100 meters above the lake or succeeded to escape there, must have thought themselves secure, were trapped when the water reached the top and they found that instead of being on a secure hill, they were on a shrinking island, cut off from the mainland.

The second comment is about the use of the ark and the saving of animals. First about the animals. It seems to be certain that animals could save themselves. They did not have the considerations of humans, about family, property, farming implements, etc. Animals have instincts, and they flee. How many succeeded is a different question. Escaping by boat could have been an option for those who lived on the seamount, were occupied in fishing, had boats and used that boat to reach the mainland and safety. In the north, where the sea advanced very fast, boats were probably not a feasible option. What they needed was fast decisions and strong legs. But then it must have been such an extraordinary experience that even in modern circumstances it would be difficult to predict how people would react. The people in Pompeii had the opportunity to escape, if only they would have recognized the danger in time. And they lived next to an active volcano; they must have known the possible dangers.

It seems that the story of the Bible and the other ancient stories about the Deluge were essentially correct. If the Deluge had the speed and intensity, as Ryan and Pitman, and others, described, then not many people could survive the event, neither in the shallow water in the north, nor in the deeper water near the south shore. It must have been a long period of recuperation until the remaining people could organize their lives again.

Dispersal of the Survivors

After the flood, the world was desolate, no people remained, apart of Noah, his wife, their three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, with their wives. According to Gen.9.18-19, this what remained of humanity:

"These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread."

This is how the deluge ended. A new covenant was made with God, it was sealed with the rainbow, symbolizing that the rains have ended at last and a new beginning was made.

After this story of ending the deluge, there were added two additional chapters. They were needed to connect the biblical story to the reality which each listener, or reader, knew very well, that there were many peoples on earth, they spoke different languages, and there was indeed a need to explain how of they all descended from one family. The first chapter, Gen. 10, gave an explanation about the existence of different people, and the second, Chap. 11, showed why were so many different languages.

The list of people, as given in Chap.10, probably gave a full picture of the ethnic composition of the known world as it was then. It was the Middle East, the Levant, Anatolia and the Greek islands. It seems that Europe, and even Greece, was still unknown. Chap. 10.5 writes about the sons of Javan (Ionian in Hebrew) that:

"...by these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations."

So, the Gentiles were living on their isles; no mainland was known or considered worth mentioning. So far about the solution of the Bible. There was a deluge, everybody, except members of a righteous family perished, a new beginning was made, which naturally came from the family. Because of unforeseen circumstances, the Tower of Babel, the descendants of that single family were split into nations, each with its language.

According to historical and archaeological sources there was a catastrophe before historical times. That catastrophe occurred in the north of the then known world. One of the results of the catastrophe was an extensive migration, which spread all over the Middle East, Anatolia and parts of Europe, and had a major part in shaping the present world.

There was a classical writer, Diodorus Siculus, who wrote, among others, about the history of the island of Samothrace, one of the Greek islands at the western entrance of the Dardanelles. According to Diodorus Siculus, there was so much water in the Euxine Lake, that the water burst out through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. The flood inundated the west

coast of Asia Minor and low-laying parts of the island of Samothrace.

It seems that Samothrace was one of the places where the refugees of the flood have settled. That is the reason why Diodorus mentioned the catastrophe. As far as the inundation of the Asian coast and the island of Samothrace itself is concerned, it is probably connected with the heavy rains which accompanied the deluge, rather than the flow of water out of the Euxine into the Mediterranean.¹⁵

The report of Diodorus Siculus is not alone in suggesting bad weather and heavy rains accompanying the deluge. It has been mentioned that the rainfall at the Dead Sea was the heaviest ever in the years of the deluge. In addition, it should be taken also into account that continuous cloud and rain cover the sun, which could have caused a permanent winter for a number of years. So, starvation joined the deluge as part of the catastrophe.

The Iranians have a myth that their ancestors escaped a long winter of snow and ice by building a 'var', an underground city. A complex of underground cities was found near the area of Lake Van, in historic Cappadocia, in the vicinity of the modern city of Derinkuyu. The underground complex contains at least 30 underground cities, connected by underground tunnels. The size of the cities and that of the whole compound is enormous. The only underground city, which was excavated so far, reaches 8 floors underground in an area of four square kilometers. There is a vast network of airshafts, water wells, and water tanks at the bottom and various access tunnels. There are also a large number of living rooms, kitchens, and storerooms. Neither the depth nor the size has been finally established; the excavations are still continuing. The other, possible 30, underground cities were not touched so far.¹⁶

If the deluge of the Euxine Lake is taken into account, then there are a number of legends, which become more realistic, than without it. The Mandaeans, an Arab tribe living in the marsh area of southern Iraq, claim they originated in ancient Egypt, wandered from there to a mythical location, the Mountain of Madai, in Iranian Kurdistan, not far from Lake Urmia, and the cave cities of Cappadocia, and from there to their present home. They really have some ancient Egyptian words in their language.

If the extended drought and dry weather, which preceded the deluge, is taken into consideration, then the ancestors of the Mandaeans could have been among those who sought refuge in the oasis of the Euxine Lake. Later they escaped the deluge into Iranian Kurdistan, near Lake Urmia and from

there to Mesopotamia.

These two examples are not exceptional cases. Most of the peoples in the Middle East point to the north as their place of origin some even to specific direction, to the mountains of Anatolia and Armenia.

The people who settled southern Mesopotamia, those who created first the Ubaid culture and later the Sumerian cities, the world's first urban civilizations, have certainly originated from the north, and moreover they seemed to have lost contact with their former homeland. Their language was akin to the languages from the Ural-Altai family, like Finnish and Hungarian.¹⁷ They had a mythical connection with a northern city, called Aratta, which seemed to be in the area of the Lake Urmia – Garden of Eden region

The Sumerians had a certain curiosity in their language. Most of their root words were monosyllabic. Those words, however, which were connected with agriculture and crafts were polysyllabic. They were probably acquired in the mixing pot of the Euxine Lake. The words of husbandry were monosyllabic though, showing that in their homeland, somewhere in Central Asia they had a pastoral existence. They brought that language to Mesopotamia as the Ubaid, and were known later as the Sumerians.

Predynastic Egypt was also somehow connected with the dispersion of the survivors. Egypt experienced a rapid cultural and economic change during that period. A new flint industry was introduced, which produced two-sided flaked tools, similar to those produced in Anatolia and Canaan. The art of pottery appeared then for the first time in the valley of the Nile. Domesticated cereals and animals with direct genetic affinity to Asia were suddenly adopted, together with the first systematic practice of planting and harvesting.¹⁸

The similarities between the changes of predynastic Egypt and the el-Ubaid culture were so striking that they brought scholars to wonder, whether both civilizations had a common origin. That the first Egyptian rulers called themselves the Followers of Horus both in Lower and Upper Egypt, and the fact that the coastal road between Egypt and Canaan was called the Road of Horus, even in historical times, only added to the conviction.

Probably it was Sir Arthur Keith, who went farthest in this respect. He commented on the expedition report of C. L. Wooley:¹⁹

"The southern Mesopotamians.... had big, long and narrow heads... Their affinities were with the peoples of Caucasian or European type. We may regard southwestern Asia as their cradleland until new evidence leading to a different conclusion comes to light. They were akin to the predynastic people of Egypt."

The deluge probably affected most of the areas immediately bordering on the now expanded Black Sea. There are signs that agricultural villages, like Catal Huyuk and Hacilar, were taken over by people, who probably came from the north, refugees from the deluge. Both communities were deserted during the period of the cold and dry climate of the late seventh millennium BC, with the previous population probably moving to the oasis of the Euxine Lake. They were reoccupied after the deluge with people who introduced advanced painted pottery. That the deluge caused considerable stress in the area is proven by the fact that at Hacilar a defensive wall surrounded the level of the reoccupation above the level of desertion. The walls were destroyed shortly after their completion. The invaders built a new fortress on top of the destroyed walls. The new population had different pottery, showing different techniques and traditions. The mixing pot of the Euxine Lake has exploded in all directions.

The Ubaid, who later became the Sumerians, went to the south; so did those who reached Egypt. Others reached the Levant, and the people who spoke languages from the Kartvian family of languages, reached the Caucasus.

There was one group of people who spoke a proto-Indo-European language, who were separated into two parts, without further contact between them, at least not in the following few millennia. The expanded Black Sea became a barrier. In the west, there was the cataract of the Bosphorus, probably without the waterfall, but it still must have been a formidable and frightening barrier. In the east there were the mountains of the Caucasus which were not less forbidding.

The linguists who were searching for the homeland of the Indo-Europeans have built a method to do so. They developed a dictionary of words, which were common to all Indo-European languages. So, according to the contents of that dictionary, they could look for the homeland. If the dictionary contained a common word for beech tree and salmon, then the cradle of the people, who used the proto-Indo-European language was somewhere where both the beech and the salmon were natives.

This method had a useful byproduct. They found that languages change by

a certain factor each century. Checking a specific dictionary against the common dictionary of the proto-Indo-European language can give a fair estimate when a particular language has parted from the common stock.

Applying these rules to the known Indo-European languages, it was found that the Anatolian branch of the Indo-European family of languages was the first language that parted from the rest. The Hittite language belonged to the Anatolian branch. It meant that after the Black Sea deluge, the southern part of the Indo-Europeans were separated from their kinsmen, and had no contact with them. That separation was in the mid-sixth millenium BC. The later intrusion of northerners to the Middle East through the Caucasus and the Bosphorus was far in the future. Checking the Hittite dictionary against the common one, it was found it contained no more than 20% of the proto-dictionary. Still, because the grammar of the language remained consistent with the rules of the common grammar, Hittite is still accepted as an Indo-European language.

The northern branch of the Indo-Europeans branched out in all directions. Some went west, and later became Celts, Italians and Greeks,²⁰ some to the north to become Germans, Balts and Slavs, still others returned south as Armenians, Iranians, Afghans, Indians and various tribes of Parthians. There were those who remained in the same place, north of the Black Sea and the Caspian, as Scythians, Sarmatians and Cimmerians. There was even one member of the family who turned up in Chinese Turkestan. They were the Tocharians. As Chinese Turkestan has a dry climate, the remains of some Tocharians were found as dried out mummies. Judging from their clothes and the weapons found next the mummies, their technical level was not inferior to that of their brothers in Europe. Despite their living in the desert of Chinese Turkestan, they were in contact with their kin in Europe. Their language was akin to the Celtic members of the Indo-European family of languages. Their clothing, with many colored tartans was also similar to the Celtic dresses. As an interesting byproduct of the Black Sea deluge, the Tocharians were instrumental in introducing Buddhism unto China, through the age-old trade path, the Silk Route. There are also signs that they were involved in introducing the first civilization into China.²¹

The end of the Black Sea deluge went indeed according the path of Gen. 10 – 11, except that the spread of the peoples and languages was much wider than what was said in the Bible. There is one more comment should be added to the relation between the Bible and archaeological data. This is the question of the Semites.²²

One of the sons of Noah, according the Bible, was Shem, the eponymous father of the Semites, and Ham, the eponymous father of the Hamites. Among the descendants of Ham were the Ethiopians, the Egyptians and the Canaanites too. It is interesting to note that the Bible makes a difference between the Semites, meaning the Hebrews, and the Canaanites.

As far as archaeological evidences are concerned, there is no proof that the Semites were among those finding refuge in the oasis of the Euxine Lake, so they had no part in the dispersion too. The accepted theory about the existence of the Semites in the Middle East is, that they infiltrated from the Arabian Peninsula, as workers and soldiers, and eventually as conquerors. As conquerors they assimilated the native people, as it was done in many other parts of the world. According to Map 2, the Semites reached their northern border approximately on the line of the border between Syria and Turkey, and their eastern border on the line between Iraq and Iran. These were the borders, established about 5000 years ago, and these are the borders today. As far as the Semites being in the north and participating in the dispersal of peoples, after the deluge, we have only the evidence of Gen. 10. 21.

Notes

1. 1. Dora Jane Hamblin, Has the Garden of Eden been located at last?, Smithsonian Magazine, Vol. 28, No. 2, May 1987, she was not alone in looking in the south for the Garden of Eden Merrill F. Unger, op.cit., p.40 ; quotes Friedrich Delitzsch who located it just north to the city of Babylon, and A. H. Sayce who located it at Eridu. Thomas Mann, op.cit., p.43 "The site of Paradise would still be in Babylonian sphere of interest, but not in Babylon itself, rather in the Armenian Alpine country north of Mesopotamia Itself."
2. David Rohl, *Genesis and the Followers of Horus*, Transcript of lecture given on 3 September 1997, at the Millstadt Forum: "What is Truth?: Man between Phantasy and Reality".p.5/24
3. Idem, p.6/24
4. Idem, p.8/24
5. Colbourn Rushton, *The Origin of Civilized Societies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.35 Emilio Spedicato, op.cit., p.14/27
6. N. Stearns, Michael Adar, Stuart B. Schwartz, *Tha Agrarian Revolution and the Birth of Civilization*, World Civilization, The Global Experience, Vol.I. pp. 2 – 19, Reprint p.2/6 Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, Dell Books, New York, 1965, Vol.I. p.91

7. Thomas Gale Moore, *Global Warming, A Boon to Humanity and Other Animals*, Hoover Institute Working Paper, 1995, p.13/17 Marvin Harris, op.cit., p.18 Maria T. Phelps, *How Important is the Role of Intelligence in the Rise of Civilizations?* Mankind Quarterly, Vol. 34, 6.1.94, p.297 Colbourn Rushton, op.cit.,p.31, Gordon Childe , What happened...,op.cit. p.61 Jacquette Hawkes, *Prehistory*, Mentor Books, New York, 1965, p. 75
8. Gordon Childe *Prehistory of European Societies*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth, 1958, p.169 Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, op.cit. pp. 86 – 88
9. David Rohl, op.cit., p.9/24
10. Gunnar Heinsohn, op.cit., p.7/23
11. Idem, ibid
12. W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, Doubleday Anchor Book, New York, 1957,p.9
13. Ryan & Pitman, op.cit., pp. 212 – 213
14. Barry Wigmore, *The Hunt for Noah's Ark*, The Times (London), 15.2.p2000 The increased moisture in the air due to evaporation from both the cataract as well as sheet flooding of the dry basin could have resulted at some point in truly torrential rains in a region that had not experienced the likes for millions of years
15. Ryan & Pitman, op.cit., p.250
16. 13. Turkish Tourist Bureau, *Cavetowns and Gorges Of Cappadocia*, 1997 Andrew Collins, op.cit., Cha[. III.,p3/13
17. Emilio Spedicato, , op.cit., p. 19/27, Noah S. Kramer, *The Sumerians*, University of Chicago, Chicago, pp. 41 – 43
18. M.A. Hoffman, *Egypt before the Pharaohs*, Barnes & Noble, New York, 1979, pp. 102, 181
19. C.L. Wooley, *The Sumerians* W.W. Norton, New York, 1965, pp. 6 –7, footnote of Sir Arthur Keith
20. Ryan & Pitman, op.cit. pp. 194 – 195 Arther Ferrill, *Neolithic Warfare*, Quarterly Journal of Military History, 1995, p. 5/7
21. Colin Renfrew, op.cit.,p.66, Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China*, Canto Books, Cambridge, 1992, p.38. Michael W. Masters, *The Origin of Races*, AR July-August 1995, p.8/10 Thomas Mann, op.cit.p.34
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THE PATRIARCHS



The Road to Canaan

The deluge was over. Noah, and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Yapheth have settled down, raised families, and became the eponymous ancestors of the human race. It is worth mentioning that the Old Testament did not follow the definitions of modern race theory: it assigned the descendants of the three brothers according to territories and not according to language or racial origin. Judging from the names of the brothers, the compilers of the Old Testament wanted to account for the families of peoples, who were involved in the Middle East.

Today, we would certainly assign the descendants of Shem to the Semites, Arabs, Jews, Akkadeans, Arameans, etc., the descendants of Japheth to the family of Indo-Europeans, and those of Ham to the Hamites, among them the Egyptians, Ethiopians, etc. The Old Testament assigned the Semitic Canaanites and Amorites to be Hamitic, because of their nearness and connection with Hamitic Egypt. It also assigned the Hittites and the Jebusites to the group of Hamites, because they lived in Canaan, and for some unknown reason it did so to the Cypriots and the Cretans.

The book of Genesis is really a continuing story of a single family, starting with the creation of the world, their sojourn in the Garden of Eden, and ending with their descent to Egypt. The last two chapters of the Book of Genesis tell the story of the death of Jacob, his burial in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, and the death of Joseph. With these two chapters the story of the family ends. From then on, the continuation of the story is not about the family, but about a people that grew out of that family. The only connection between the story of the Book of Genesis and its continuation is the names of the twelve tribes, whose eponymous fathers were Jacob's children and grandchildren.

As the Book of Genesis is really the story of a single family, it duly recorded only the direct link in each generation. Together with the name of

the child who was in the line of direct descent, the Bible recorded also the age of the father when the child was born, and the remaining years of the father after the birth. Compiling a record based on those numbers shows a truly amazing picture.

Between Noah and Abraham, there were ten generations. According the Bible, when Abraham was born, all ten of his ancestors were still around and in apparent good health. When Abraham has died at the age of 175, two of his ancestors survived him. The first was Shem, his ancestor nine times removed, and the second was Eber.

Using that chronology to calculate the distance between the deluge and Abraham's birth, then it is found that only 392 years passed between the two. We know, that the near accurate date of the deluge was 5500 BC, therefore Abraham was born at the end of the 52nd century BC. According to a previous estimation, Abraham's approximate lifetime was at the end of the 3rd millennium BC. There are three millennia between the two estimates. Indeed according to traditional figures, Abraham was born in 2166 BC and died in 1991 Bc, at the age of 175.

It is obvious that the biblical chronology cannot be a base to a historical analysis. One wonders why ancient sources stressed those inflated ages in mythological stories. The Old Testament's list of Noah's descendants was not a solitary example. The Sumerian list of kings is even more extreme. It is not only the longevity that is common to the presentation of the Old Testament and the Sumerian king-list. There are two more common elements. The first of them is, that in both lists, the years of the people in ante-diluvian times were much longer, than in the years after it. The second is that in addition to their longevity they seemed to have special, super-human powers,

Sarah was 60 when going with Abraham to Egypt. Abraham was worried that Sarah's beauty will cause him trouble, so he presented her as his sister. The same Abraham was 140 when Sarah died. He married again and had six more sons. The long years and the special powers continued to be in the family. Isaac and Jacob, and even Joseph had very long years and special powers, and that in a period where the average length of life was no more than 50. This is at least the testimony of the excavations. It is obvious that superhuman age and ability were among those elements that distinguished the chosen few from ordinary mortals.^{[1](#)}

So, there is a difference of three millennia between the calculated and actual

dates. The expression of actual date means, that it is based on some reasonable hypothesis. There can be a number of reasons for that huge variation of dates.

One of the reasons, probably the simplest is that the names and the ages are pure mythology and as such everything is allowed. There is a second possibility, that both the Patriarchs, whose stories are described in the Book of Genesis, and their ancestors too, were not single but composite persons. Thomas Mann hinted on this possibility in his book, *The Tales of Jacob*. The hero of the book, young Joseph, says that the name of his father is Jacob, his grandfather is Isaac and his great-grandfather was Abraham. They were all real, flesh-and-blood persons. However, beyond them was another mythical triad, also called Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And the two triads are mixed in his imagination.

There is also a third possibility, It is that each of the ten generations that separated the generation of Abraham from that of Noah, was not a human generation but a period which was named after a certain person, probably an eponymous father symbolizing the period. It is possible that the Bible itself provides a clue. The list of Abraham's ancestors and their ages are given in Gen.11.-10-27:

Noah	448 (after the deluge)
Shem	602
Arpaxad	438
Shelach	433
Eber	464
Peleg	239
Reu	239
Serug	230
Nahor	148
Terah	70 (until the birth of Abraham)

If the year of life of each family member is added, a number of 3311 is received. Deducting it from 5,500, the year of the deluge, the result is 2,189 that is very near the traditional year of Abraham's birth. Admittedly, it is not a scientific method of calculation, but then it is a text, full of cryptic references and codes, which might have been perfectly familiar to the listeners, or readers, of their time, but are hidden from us

. It is worth while to concentrate on the third hypothesis, as it can give answers to many questions, which so far remained without answers. Accordingly, Abraham's ancestors were probably not individual people, but

eponymous fathers of clans, who might have been preeminent in certain periods. If it is so, then that hypothesis should have proof, either in some ancient archive, or on scratched potsherds found in archaeological excavations.

Exactly such proofs were found in more than one archives of northern Mesopotamia, in an area stretching between Ebla in the west and Nuzi in the east. It is a wide belt of land, whose southern border is the line between Ebla and Asshur, its northern border is the line between Ur and Lake Urmia. Map 6. shows that territory in detail. In simpler terms, it is the valley of the river Balikh, between the Euphrates in the west and the Habur in the east.

Before describing the hypothesis in detail, there is hidden evidence in the list of the ten ancestors. The first five ancestors on the list, whose lifetime stretched to about two-thirds of the three millennia between the deluge and the birth of Abraham, left no historical traces. Of the rest of the list, apart of Reu, there are clear traces on the ground, exactly in the area that was described above. The fifth member of the list, Eber, might have left a trace in the name of the king of Ebla, Ibrum or Ebrum, but he also could have been part of the composite personage of Abraham. However, neither the Eblaite kingship, nor the period of Abraham, which were approximately coeval, fit the position of Eber in the list.

The names of four members on the list were found in more than one archives of the middle Euphrates Valley. They were found in the royal Assyrian archives, in the archives of Nuzi and also in that of Mari.

According to the findings:^{[2](#)}



Peleg appears as a town called Paliga, on the Euphrates, just above the junction with the Habur.



Serug is found as Sarugi



Nahor is known in the Assyrian archives as Til Nahiri



Terah is known as Til Turakhi

It should be mentioned here that the Assyrian Til is equivalent to the modern Arabic or Hebrew Tel, which means an artificial mound that covers the ruins of a village or a city. As the Assyrian archives originated in the first millenium BC. it means that the cities of Nahor and Terah were abandoned by then. All the cities or villages whose references were found in the contemporary archives were situated on the rivers Balikh-Euphrates, not below the junction of the Habur river. Putting both these findings and those

of the previous chapter within a framework, the following logical scenario can be constructed.

There was a small tribe, who lived since time immemorial in an area, which was east of Lake Urmia. That territory was known in early historical times as Armenia. It is known today as Iranian Azerbaijan. The tribe was especially lucky because that particular plot of land was beautiful and fruitful. They called it then the Garden of Eden. It is called now the Meydan-e Shah, the Garden of the Shah, which is not far from the original name. The racial belonging of that tribe or clan is irrelevant. If they had remained there, they would have been called Armenians in classical times, probably Iranians after that and Azeris today. But they did not remain there.

At the end of the seventh millennium BC, with the deterioration of the climate, the clan has moved to the oasis around the Euxine Lake, which was a large sweet-water lake, known today as the Black Sea. They must have found shelter somewhere on the south shore of the lake, probably around the area of the seamount which is opposite the mouth of the Halys. Judging from the stories told by the Bible about the deluge, the escape by an ark and the stranded people on hills they probably lived around the seamount, as in other places quick decision and strong legs were probably sufficient to be saved from the deluge.

When the Euxine Lake disappeared in the deluge that occurred in the mid-sixth millennium BC, some of the clan succeeded to escape and eventually settled in the valley of the Balikh. Why there? This question can be asked from any people who were wandering around to find a place to settle. The answer is usually the same. People settle where they can. Either they settle in empty places, if they can find any, or where the resistance is weak, or lacking that where they are accepted as immigrant workers. So, our migrant tribe settled in that valley, because it was empty, or they were stronger than the previous owners.

So, they settled down in that valley and did what everybody else did at that time. They did the best what they could to survive, to beat off marauding parties who were looking for what they themselves were looking in their time; a place to live. The sojourn of the tribe in that valley was very long; it may continue even today. After all, the story of the Bible does not speak about an exodus of a people from the old country to look for a new home. The story is about a single clan, who decided to leave and settle somewhere else. They might not have been the first to do so, and maybe not the last. When Abraham reached Canaan, he was greeted by the Hittites of Hebron as one of them, even as a great prince among them, and was accepted by

the king of Jerusalem as an equal.

From the time of their arrival to that valley until the start of the story of the family, there were about three millennia. At the beginning, they must have been a small community. One does not have to accept that only a single family has escaped from the holocaust, but it certainly was a terrible catastrophe, which did not leave many alive. It must have been a long time until the numbers increased, with new villages and towns settled, and named after their founders. Probably, the whole area thought themselves as kin, with common ancestors, language, customs and religion. The sense of belonging went further than the confines of the valley. There must have been similar groupings all around them, otherwise they could not have survived so long, with the same language and customs.

There is one important element in the geographical area, where the Noah clan has settled. It was the boundary between the Semitic south and the non-Semitic north. It is difficult to decide on the evidence of the Bible, whether they belonged to the south or the north. Whatever it was, there must have been mutual influences and cross-fertilization. Some of the names, like Eber, Peleg and Reu were Semitic, but their customs and religion was probably more non-Semitic than Semitic. The use of the expression, non-Semitic, means that in later, historical times, that area was the center of the Kingdom of Mitanni, ruled by Indo-European aristocracy over a mass of Hurrians, who were of Caucasian stock.

According the evidence of the Old Testament³ and some of their religious and political customs, it seems that they were Hittites and not Hurrians. But it is a conjecture and not a certainty.⁴ Moreover, it has no importance. The kingdom of Mitanni was still in the future, so the later ethnic composition might not have been the same nearly a millennium before it.

So, the Valley of the Balikh was the area from where Abraham was supposed to continue his journey to Canaan, after his father Terah died in Haran. This statement immediately contacts the main question of this chapter. Where exactly did Abraham (and Terah) start their journey to Canaan. Map 6 shows the scene of Abraham's journey. There are three major locations on that map; Ur in the lower right corner, Canaan in the lower left corner, and Haran is up north, east of the Euphrates.

Traveling from Ur in lower Mesopotamia to Canaan through Haran in the upper Balikh valley is making a first trip of about 600 miles along the Euphrates and the Balikh, and then turning south and making another trip

of about 400 miles to Canaan, probably through Damascus. There is a more direct way, through the desert between Ur and the valley of the Jordan. It can be done but it is very unsuitable for large herds of animals. The logistic of water supply to the animals, and to the people, would be insurmountable and certainly beyond the capabilities of that period. So, if Abram was indeed a caravaneer, a form of itinerant peddler, then the longer trip would be logical because then he would be able to trade on the road. Similarly, if he had a large herd of animals, the northern road would have been much preferable, because he would have water all along the way. But was there a need to travel from Ur in lower Mesopotamia to Canaan? It is an important question in the matter of the Patriarchs, and it should be resolved. Where was the home of the Patriarchs?

It should be emphasized that the Old Testament is not responsible for the confusion. Gen. 11.31 says about the starting point of the journey:

"And Terah took Abram, his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there. And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran."

This chapter of the Bible must have been very clear to its contemporaries; it was much less clear to modern scholars wishing to understand it. By defining Ur of the Chaldees, it signaled that there were more than one city with the name of Ur. This fact alone should have warned the scholars that the answer is not self-evident. The Old Testament did not add qualifiers to names of cities, unless there were more than one place with that name, and that gave a sign to which city it referred.

Gen.11. 11-12 wrote about the cities of Nineveh, Rehoboth, Calah and Resen, without mentioning that they were in Assyria. The listeners, or the readers, knew it and there was no need for qualification. In this particular case, there was more than one city, bearing the name Ur.

In addition, the Old Testament did not refer to Chaldees, it used the word Kassdim. The translation of Kassdim to Chaldeans is a mistake and an anachronism. The Chaldeans played a major role in southern Mesopotamia in the first millennium BC, but the story of Abram happened in the third millennium BC.

There is a problem about the exact meaning of the word 'Kassdim'. Some think that the word refers to the name 'Khaldû', one of the names of the

Hurrians who later became the Kurds, or to 'Khaldis' the name of the congregation of gods in the Hurrian Pantheon. It is also possible that the word is a distortion of the name of the Kassites, an Indo-European tribe, also active in that area. So, there were many possible avenues to investigate, especially as the Bible clearly indicated that there was more than one city with that name. Why was it then identified as the Ur of the Sumerians on the lower Euphrates?

It seems that the reason is simple. There is one city, named Urfa, which is in the area of Haran. In classical times the city was called Edessah and Haran was called Carrhae, the site of Crassus' defeat by the Parthians. Muslim traditions connect Abraham with Urfa⁵, Urhai in Aramaic, but the southern Ur was much better known. Leonard Woolley excavated it in the 20s. The place is called today the 'Tel al-Muqayyar' – 'the mound of bitumen' because its imposing Ziggurat was covered by bitumen. The town was discovered in the desert of Mesopotamia in 1854.

When modern scholars started to study the Bible, there was only one Ur on the map, Ur of southern Mesopotamia. Although, the second Ur was also known, at least in Turkey, but not in the circles of scholars. So it was neglected, or not even known about. Only the results of the excavations of Ebla put the northern Ur back to the scientific world. However, it seems that so many scientific reputations were in stake, that the southern Ur remained the preference of the scientific community. It is not the first time that scholarly reputations prove stronger than scientific truths.⁶

However, even the upholders of the scholarly reputations were aware that Ur on the lower Euphrates was not really suitable for a starting point of Abraham's journey, so they added explanations and embellishments. In that, ancient Jewish sources assisted them, adding their own embellishment, probably because of the same reason. They did not know about the existence of the second Ur, so they fitted the story to the known city. Thus, in an ancient Jewish legend, Terah was a merchant who sold clay idols, and Abraham who was supposed to mind the store, broke the idols to show his contempt. Modern scholars twisted that story and there were some that made of Abraham a man-about-town, who enjoyed the fleshpots of the city. Others, wishing to account for Abraham's journey first north, then back south and finally to Egypt and back again, decided that he was a donkey caravaneer⁷ plying the route between Mesopotamia and Egypt, trading all the way. This occupation would certainly account for the trip, and for the 318 armed retainers, who recovered Lot from the captivity of the king of Elam. However, it would not account for the company of his father, his

wife and his nephew on the trip, nor for his herd of cattle, and that of Lot, which were so big that they were compelled to separate.

Apart of the testimony of the Old Testament itself, there were many reasons why Ur in lower Mesopotamia was not suitable to be Ur Kassdim of the Bible. Abraham was a man of means, owner of a large herd of cattle, and so was his nephew, Lot. The size of their herds compelled them to part ways in Canaan, because they wanted to avoid frictions between their herdsmen. The city of Ur on the lower Euphrates was a busy trading emporium; it had two harbors on the river and flourishing agriculture around it. Agriculture in desert condition means irrigation, so irrigation canals must have crisscrossed the area around the city. It was not a suitable environment for large-scale husbandry.

There is also another, much simpler question. Terah was from the valley of the Balikh, he had a village named after him there. His grandson, Lot had his father there, who was Terah's son. All their kin were in northern Mesopotamia. They certainly were not Sumerians and probably not Semitic. What were they doing in Ur and how they got there? In modern life it is common to move from one place to another. It certainly was not so in ancient times. If they were not born there from parents who themselves were citizens of the town, then they could not be citizens, so they could be neither merchants nor caravaneers. If they really were in Ur on the lower Euphrates, it would have been such an extraordinary event, that we would expect to receive some explanations, about the how and why.

So, Ur of the lower Euphrates was certainly not the starting point of Abraham's journey. But then, the Old Testament clearly says so in many places. Gen. 12.1 informs us that:

"Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house."

That was after Terah's death, The country, the kindred and his father's house were in Haran. In Gen. 24.2, Abraham repeats the instruction when instructing his servant to go back to the old country to find a suitable wife for Isaac:

"...but thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac."

And the servant went to the valley of the Balikh, unto the city of Nahor, but not before asking his master what to do, if he finds a girl and she will not

want to return with him.

"And the servant said unto him. Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land, must I needs to bring thy son again unto the land whence thou camest?"

Abraham answers that he does not wish his son to return there, as it would be against the wishes of the Lord, "which took me from my father's house."

It cannot be clearer. Abraham came from the valley of the Balikh, there was his father's house, his kindred and his country. But the same notion returns again and again. Isaac received his wife from his old country, from his family, so did his son Jacob, who personally went to Haran to his uncle, Laban. These quotations are convincing enough, but there is another one, which points to the map, to show where Ur really was. In the Book of Joshua Chap.24.2 Joshua says farewell to the people:

"Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor; and they served other gods."

The flood in the Bible is always the river Euphrates. Map 6 clearly shows that Ur on the lower Euphrates was on the west side of the river, 'this side' from Canaan. The second Ur, in the valley of the Balikh, was on the east side of the Euphrates, the 'other side'.

The final and probably the most decisive non-biblical testimony came from the excavations of Ebla, where a tablet was found, writing about 'Ur in the district of Haran'.^{[8](#)}

So, Abraham has started his journey in Ur on the Balikh, continued to Haran, where his father Terah had died, and from then on to Canaan, the land that was promised by God. What did he find in Canaan? Judging from the testimony of the Bible, he found very little.

There is a chance remark in the Book of Genesis about the state of Canaan, (12.6) : "The Canaanites were then in the land" and another remark when he returned from Egypt and decided to part company with Lot to avoid future strife between their herdsmen, (Gen.13.7) "and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land." Apart of these two remarks, there is nothing. If Abraham had any human contact, apart of his family and retainers, it was with kings, in connection with his alliance against the Elamites, and with the Hittites in Hebron.

In his first itinerary in Canaan, he did not leave the central highland. After passing the Jordan, he reached Schechem, probably through the gap in the hills somewhere near Meggido, from there to Bethel and finally to Hebron. In fact he was moving through territory which was probably settled by Hittites, who might have had similar origin and background.⁹ It is not surprising that he did not meet many people, at least there is no report about meeting them, and also that he had to cut short his first visit because there was a famine in the land.

The sentence about the famine is one of those historical data that help to date the events. From the beginning of the 3rd millennium, or even before that, until about 2400 BC, there was a period of rainy climate in the Middle East. That was the period when Egypt was unified and when the first dynasties built the pyramids and other huge monuments. It is possible that the builders were coerced slaves, but even coerced people need food, which can be taken only from surplus. The very existence of surplus in an agriculture society means good climate. In Palestine and in the Levant in general, there was a demographic explosion and the creation of an economy whose main customer was Egypt.

They planted vineyards and orchards on the terraces of the valleys, and had flocks of sheep and goat, whose husbandry was local transhumance; winter pasture on the highlands and summer pasture on the stubble of the grainfields after the harvest. In addition, the forested hills provided timber to the Egyptian building industry. There was no unified political system. There were independent city-states. It was a decentralized country, with each city managing its affairs. For more than 500 years they had prosperity.

That prosperity had collapsed at about 2400 BC with the advent of an extended drought. The change of the climate affected Egypt as well, as the First Immediate Period was exactly at that time, and probably was caused by it, but it affected the economy of Egypt much less than that of the Levant. Egyptian agriculture, and economy, did not depend on rainfall, of which they had nothing at all, but on the water of the Nile, whose yearly flood reflected the climate of East and Central Africa, and not the local climate. The agriculture of Palestine and the Levant depended upon rainfall. An extended period of drought brought on the familiar sequence: land normally used to grow grain became steppe, and steppe turned into desert. The population which had grown out of all proportion in the good times of prosperity, had to find alternative places to survive. Some infiltrated Egypt, some went to Arabia and some to the rivers of northern Mesopotamia.¹⁰

Egypt was in a comparatively advantageous situation, and it was a prime target for would-be infiltrators and immigrants. It was probably not the first, and certainly not the last massive attempt of hungry people to enter Egypt by force. There is a scant information about this aspect in the First Intermediate Period. However, there is much more information about a similar situation at the end of the Bronze Age. That was at the time of the collapse of the Mycaenean civilization, about a millennium after Abraham, when Libyan invaders came with women and children, as their last chance for life was to enjoy Egypt's bounty, which was less dependent on climate than Libya was. [11](#)

Abraham's entry to Canaan and his trip to Egypt were probably at the end of the 3rd millennium BC. While Canaan might not have been exactly empty, still in the highlands where he spent his short visit, there probably were not many people. That area was probably suitable for grazing, but not for agriculture dependent on rain. So, the Old Testament recorded the fact that the Canaanites and the Perizzites were in the land, probably in the west along the seashore, and in the east in the valley of the Jordan.

There is an interesting sentence in Gen. 13.10, writing about the plain of the Jordan:

"...and Lot lifted his eyes and beheld all the plain of the Jordan, that it was well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt."

There was one common element between the valley of the Jordan, the Garden of Eden and the land of Egypt. Rivers, not depending on local conditions, watered all three. Admittedly, the Jordan was not exactly in the league of the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates, but it was still better than the drought-stricken highlands.

About Abraham's visit to Egypt, there are two subjects. One of them concerns the story Sarah, her beauty and Abraham's concern about it, and his deceit in dealing with it. The second concerns the circumcision, which at that time was a specific Egyptian custom, and of Egypt alone, which became the visible sign of the Covenant.

The episode with Sarah, was probably one of the 'topos' which was common in stories at that time. It returned again with Abraham and the King of Gerar, and also with Isaac and Rebecca. As a 'topos' it has no

historical value, without place in a historical analysis. There are two comments about the Egyptian visit.

The first is that Sarah was beautiful and that beauty was visible to all. It was common for Egyptians, where women did not cover their faces, but it was not common for Semites. It is probably one of the signs for the ethnic origin of Abraham and Sarah. The second comment is about Abraham's meeting with Pharaoh. In normal circumstances, such a meeting would have been impossible, unless Abraham was a visiting royalty, or some very important person. However, the visit was in the First Intermediate period, with many Pharaohs at the same time, and it was probably easier for a visiting chieftain to meet one of them.

As for a possible influence of the Egyptian visit on later religious developments, the subject is treated in depth in the chapter titled, Religious Interlude.

Notes

1. J. Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol.I. WORD Books, Waco, 1987, p.146
2. Idem, p. 252; Unger, op.cit., pp.112-113 ; Werner Keller, op.cit. pp.66 – 67; Furey, op.cit., p4/9
3. Gen.23.5-6; When Abraham wants to buy a burial plot in Hebron, the children of Heth (Hittites) said to him: "Hear us, my lord: thou are a mighty prince among us".
4. The custom of naming settlement after the leaders was common to Indo-Europeans and Hurrians too. The religious customs were nearer to Indo-Europeans than to the Hurrians. "Yahweh" was certainly of Indo-European origin – it means 'overflowing' in Sanskrit. The cult of the 'teraphim' was definitely Indo-European and the name Abraham might have had some affinity to the Indo-European 'brahmins'. See Riane Eisler, op.cit. p.19/24; also Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, op.cit. p.164
5. Encyclopedia Britannica, 1987, Vol. 12, p.204. (Urfa): "it lies in the fertile plain of Haran, ringed by limestone hills on three sides. It is very old and controls the strategic pass to the south, through which runs a road used since antiquity to travel between Anatolia and northern Mesopotamia. In the 2nd millennium BC it was probably the chief city of the Hurrians destroyed by the Hittites in the 14th century AD. Traditions of its earliest foundations refer to the legendary king Nimrod. Muslim legend associates the place with Abraham, whose

birthplace is still shown there in a cave under the citadel."

6. Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Combined Bible Dictionary and Concordance*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapid, 1999, p. 432, Gordon Wenham, op.cit. p. 272, Merrill T. Unger, op.cit. pp. 107, 110, Howard F. Vos, op.cit. p. 58, Joseph P. Free, op.cit. p.46
7. Ignatius Hunt, op.cit., pp. 48, 128
8. Tablet No. 250, BAR, June 1977
9. Numbers XIII.29, O.R. Gurney, op.cit.,p.50; Joseph P. Free, op.cit.,p.49, Keller, op.cit. p.111
10. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythical Past*, op.cit., p.132
11. Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age*, Princeton Press, Princeton, 1993,pp.18-21

THE PATRIARCHS



The Wars of Abraham

Chapter 14 of the Book of Genesis tells a story of a war waged by a coalition of 4 kings from the east against the kings of the Cities of the Plain, as the cities in the lower valley of the Jordan and around the Dead Sea were called. During that war, Lot, Abraham's nephew, was captured together with his family and retainers. Abraham has organized his retainers, built a coalition of his own, and pursued the invaders and released Lot and the other captives. This is the story of Chapter 14 and this chapter here. However, it is difficult to understand the story if one did not read Chapter 13 of Genesis, which explains why Lot reached the area of the Cities of the Plain, and how he became a captive.

Chapter 13 tells the story of the separation of Abraham and Lot, and the conditions that brought him to the Cities of the Plain, and to eventual captivity. Although, Chapter 14 is full of wars, battles and captivity, Chapter 13 is much more important, as far as history is concerned. The reasons for that importance are detailed here.

When Abraham and Lot returned from Egypt, they were rich men. They were rich before their trip too, but according the Old Testament Abraham received many gifts from Pharaoh before leaving Egypt. The Old Testament says:

"Abraham was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold." It is important to note the order of the wealth, it is led by cattle, which has some importance. On their return from Egypt, they reached a place between Beth-el and Ai, where they camped when first came to Canaan, and where Abraham has built an altar. Lot was also a rich man, with flocks and herds and tents. It came about that the land around Beth-el was insufficient for both herds, and there was strife between their herdsmen.

Abraham wanted to avoid further conflict, so he proposed that they

separate. He offered Lot the first choice, and added generously that he will accept any choice Lot will make. Lot has decided to descend to the valley of the Jordan and settle there. Gen. 13.10 comments: "...it was well watered every where, even as the Garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar."

It should be pointed out that from the heights of Beth-el, one couldn't see the whole of the Dead Sea. One can only see the valley of the Jordan and the north corner of the Sea, The view is obstructed by the mountains of the Judean desert, which reach nearly to the sea. In order to view the whole of the sea, one has to descend to the valley; only from the mouth of the Jordan one can view the whole.

In order to emphasize the beauty of the land, it is compared to the Garden of the Lord, the Meydan-e Shah in Tabriz Valley, and to the valley of the Nile. They are apt comparisons. The Jordan then probably was probably less exploited than it is now; it might have arrived at the Dead Sea as a river and not as a trickle.

So, Lot took his people and descended to the valley, for further adventures with the coalition of the eastern kings. Abraham remained on the highland. According the Bible, the Lord told him again that he should look around and everything he sees will belong to him and his descendants. Up to now it is the summary of Chapter 13.

There are two contents in the chapter; one is theological and the second is historical. Here, the two contents are hopelessly mixed. The theological content says, that Abraham knew that he acted under the Lord's permission, instructions even, to come and settle Canaan, where the whole land before him is his. According the chapter, it is implicitly stated that the land is his for the taking, even though "the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land."

In the story, there was a conflict between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot, but nothing is said about a possible conflict with other herdsmen or with farmers, whose land may have been trampled under the feet of their cattle. Either there were no other persons, or were unimportant if they were. It is entirely possible that the land was depopulated because of the extended period of drought, so Abraham and Lot could wander about without disturbing anyone. It is an unrealistic assumption, and moreover, it is beside the point.

It is unrealistic, in a sense, to assume that if the land was unsuitable for

agriculture, it was unsuitable for husbandry as well, otherwise neither Abraham nor Lot would have remained there. If it was suitable for them, it must have been suitable for the Canaanite and the Perizzite too. They might not have cattle, but they certainly had flocks of sheep and goat.¹

It should be added here that there is no intentions whatever to look at the situation from an ethical point-of-view. A historian has to look at his subject from the historical point, without value judgments. So, the question here is not whether Abraham and Lot were good or bad, but what they did and why, and this is exactly what this chapter is going to do.

Judging by the contents of the Book of Genesis, Abraham and the other Patriarchs belonged to one of the tribes of cattle-nomads, who lived on the border between the Semitic and the non-Semitic world. Both races had their origin in a pastoral way of life; with one basic difference between them. The Semites, who originated in the Arabian Peninsula, had flocks of sheep and goats, while those who came from the north had herds of cattle. The cause of that differentiation was environmental. The southern lands around the border of the desert were unsuitable for cattle. Abraham and Lot, and their descendants, while they had flocks of sheep and goats, they were primarily cattle-nomads, who came from somewhere north of the dividing line.

One day, Abraham and Lot, decided to leave their home in the valley of the river Balikh and turned south to find a new home in Canaan. According to the Old Testament, it was a divine promise that guided Abraham, but the motive which made them pull up stakes and relocate is irrelevant as far as a historical analysis is concerned. Colonization and conquest were always divinely approved. This subject was discussed in detail in the chapter: Historical Survey. Here we should not bother with the why's of the act; only with what they left and what they found in their new home.

Even today we would say that they left Haran, which was in the valley of Balikh, and arrived to Beth-El and later to Hebron, both in the highlands between the Jordan and the sea. That territory might have been called Canaan, just as the territory they left might have been called Padan-Aram. Both names were meaningless labels; there was no substance behind them. The existence of large territorial and political units is a recent addition to our political vocabulary, certainly not earlier than the middle of the 17th century AD, and that in the western civilization alone.

Outside of the western civilization, the concept of nation state does not exist

even today; and if it exists then it is a borrowed concept, not really accepted by all. Abraham and Lot started their journey in Haran, which at their time was called Padan-Aram, and today is called southeastern Turkey. This is what is written on the map. However, there is another map partly overlapping the territory and there the area is called Kurdistan. Looking more closely, we might discover many more maps, all different and all representing some actual reality, unconnected to the official map.

In the early days it was even more so. The map of the Middle East, or the whole known world, was a jumble of towns, villages, tribal alliances and roving bands. Each roving band carried their law wherever they went and wherever their power could reach. In this respect too, there were no racial differences. The Benjaminite tribal encampments, known from the archives of Mari, a Mesopotamian town on the middle Euphrates valley, had their religion, customs and laws, as had the roving bands of the Umman Manda, who were probably Indo-European Scythians. The roving clans of Abraham and Lot, with their retainers, herds and tents, were no exceptions. They were part of the ever-shifting mosaic of the Middle East in the early years of the 2nd millenium BC.

The case of Canaan was no exception. It was the rule. The whole of the Middle East was a crazy quilt of city-states, each with its ruler, tradition, gods and laws. It was only later that larger combination survived the founder. The subject of Chapter 14 is probably the best example. A coalition of four eastern kings goes to war, or to a raid that was more likely, against a coalition of 5 kings of the cities of the plain. The war involves a number of tribes who were living along the line of attack, and a number of additional kings who joined Abraham in recovering his nephew. The warbands, who came from the north, must have had an easy time.

The modern expansion, which is the obvious following of the prehistorical beginning, is well documented; so is the classical colonization. About the beginnings from earliest times, there is very little evidence, and whatever there is, it is in a format of mythological tales or epic poetry. Robert Graves, the high priest of Mediterranean mythology, wrote that the Greeks came to Greece in small warbands, driving their cattle before them, and settled as mercenaries in existing towns. The only testimony of that period are mythological tales, where Zeus, or some other male member of the Pantheon, marries or rapes the local representative of the Great Goddess, usually in the form of a nymph. If the tale tells about rape, then the eventual takeover was violent, if the story is about marriage then the takeover was peaceful.

The story of the Patriarchs is probably a unique case, where the intrusion of a tribe of cattle-nomads is recorded in detail, from before they started on the journey, until they have firmly settled in their new home. Chapter 13 of the Book of Genesis is an important part of the story. It was not the only one. The story of Dinah, Jacob's daughter, and the slaughter which her brothers, Simon and Levi, made in Schechem, is probably another example. Abraham's example was peaceful with no violence. If there was violence, it was against foreign invaders, which is the subject of Chapter 14.

There were a number of reasons why Abraham's case is peaceful. First, it was during an extended drought and most of the country was probably depopulated.² Second, Abraham was a chief of a strong tribe. If he could organize 318 warriors out of his retainers and cope with the coalition of four eastern kings, then he probably could have coped with any local power. Third, he defended Canaan against foreign invaders, which was probably the sole legitimate action, which an aristocracy can do to receive local acceptance. It is true that he did it to free his nephew, but he did free the other captives too and recovered the booty that the invaders carried with them. Moreover, he refused to take his share, apart of the cost, i.e. what his people ate during the campaign.

Last but not least, he did not come to unknown territory. The story of the Patriarchs mentions a number of contacts with Hittites, moreover the contacts are more like among kin, than among strangers. Abraham settles in Hebron and buys a burial cave from a Hittite, who knew him and greeted him as a great prince amongst them. His grandson Esau married two Hittite girls from Beer-Sheba. In the Book of Joshua it is written that the spies reported that the Canaanites were occupying the seashore and the valley of the Jordan, the Amalekites the southern fringes of the desert, and the Hittites the central highland. (See Map 3). According to historical sources, in the period of the Late Bronze there were many Canaanite towns with rulers who had Indo-European sounding names. It seems that the infiltration had started much earlier and Abraham was part of that process.³

The fragmentation of the cattle-nomads was not less than that of the settled people. When the Indo-European tribes invaded India in the middle of the second millennium BC, they settled in the eastern part of the valley of the Indus. There were many individuals, or groups of individuals, who continued to the east, and settled as far away as the Bengal. They were not happy under the strict rule of the kings and the Brahmins, and preferred to continue to live in their accustomed freedom. It is possible that the Hittites of Canaan, and Abraham himself, arrived under similar circumstances.

Chapter 14 of the Book of Genesis tells about a raid of 4 eastern kings, led by the king of Elam, against the kings of the 5 Cities of the Plain, i.e. the cities along the valley of the Jordan and around the Dead Sea. The cause for the invasion was that the Canaanite kings were vassals of the Elamite king for twelve years, and they rebelled in the thirteenth year.

The king of Elam, Chedorlaomer organized his allies, Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar and Tidal of the Goiim, and a year after the rebellion, he led his army along the King's Highway. On their way south, they defeated the tribes living in the area, and returned from the south and attacked the kings of the Cities of the Plain. He defeated them, took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and went north on his way home. The allied army also took captives, amongst them Lot, who was living then in Sodom.

Abraham heard about his nephew's captivity, organized his retainers, and some of his friends and allies, and followed the raiding party. He found them north of Damascus, defeated them and brought back the captives and all the goods stolen by the Elamites. On his way back from Damasus, he was met by Melchizedek, the king of Salem (Jerusalem) who was the priest of the high God. Abraham gave tithe to Melchizedek. He also returned all the captives and goods, retaining only the parts due to his allies, who joined him in the fight, and what his retainers consumed during the campaign.

This is the summary of the story of Chapter 14. It looks authentic enough. There are names, events and geographical locations. One only has to identify the names and the events, and one can easily decide whether the story of the Patriarchs is real history, or whether it was taken from some mythological legend. As it could have been expected, the answer is neither yes, nor no. There are a number of causes for the confusion. Before analyzing the relevant data, let's check the signs, which point to the authenticity of the story, and also against it.

Those for historicity are:



The names of the participants sound realistic in the context of the late 3rd millennium BC



The line of advance of the allied force was a good tactical solution. They moved along a line east of the Dead Sea, mopping up the possible allies of their enemy. They moved south until they nearly reached the Red Sea, doubled back and attacked from the southwest. Whoever wrote this chapter, and whenever it was written, knew the area very well and had a good sense of

tactics, or that he indeed reported on an actual campaign.



The story tells of a campaign led by the king of Elam, who was certainly an active participant in the murky politics of Mesopotamia. At the time of the campaign, Elam was the dominant power in Mesopotamia. They could have organized the raid under the name of Babylon. The great king, Hammurabi was the ruler of Babylon who freed Babylon from the Elamite domination.

The arguments against accepting the story as real history are:



There is no direct historical evidence of Elam being directly involved in the affairs of Canaan. They were deeply involved in Mesopotamian politics, but not in Canaan.



The story tells that Abraham mobilized 318 of his retainers, and together with his Amorite allies, Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, cornered the retreating allies, defeated them, freed the captives and recovered the loot. According to those who disagree with the historicity of the story, the number of people Abraham and his allies could put on the field, were insufficient to defeat an allied army, if indeed it was an allied army



The names of the participants in the eastern coalition sound authentic enough but there is no direct evidence either for their existence or for their possible cooperation.^{[4](#)}

It would be simple enough to decide that the question is problematic. After all, it happened more than 4000 years ago and our knowledge about that period is patchy at best. Names are important but they do not mean too much in that period. Egyptian Pharaohs had 6 official names for different occasions, and rulers could, and did, assign themselves titles as they went along. They were expert in political propaganda and manipulation of public opinion, not less than their modern counterparts, and names were useful tools to that purpose. The name of the Elamite leader was Chedorlaomer, which is a Hebrew transliteration of a real Elamite title: Kudur (meaning 'son of' or 'servant of') and Lagamar (One of the Elamite goddesses). So, Chedorlaomer might be in the original Kudur-Lagamar, which any Elamite leader could have assigned to himself.

There are two problems in connection with names. One of the problems is that on the tablets the names are written either in pure cuneiform, which is a syllabic writing, or in ideograms. The Old Testament, however, was written

in alphabetic Hebrew writing. The second problem is that a ruler of one country might be known under one name in his own country and under another outside of it. It might be a nickname, but even nicknames can cause confusion.

The analysis of Chapter 14 had to cope with both types. A good example for the first type is the attempt to identify Hammurabi with Amraphel. If one looks at the names in their modern form, and is not familiar with the secrets of ideogram writing, the two names are not similar at all. However, the name of Hammurabi in the original is written with two ideograms. One ideogram is read as Hammu, and the second is –rabi, meaning 'being great'. The second ideogram has a second meaning, which is –rapaltu – meaning about the same as –rabi. So, a Babylonian could look at the connected ideograms and read Hammu-rabi or Hammu-rapaltu, and both readings will be correct. The second reading is closer to Amraphel.

The second problem concerns the fact that one person may have one name in his own country and a different name outside of it, or that a person has a number of titles and is known by different titles in different countries. Queen Victoria was known as Queen of England in London, and the Empress of India in Bombay, and both of them were correct.

Similarly, an Elamite ruler could have been known in his own country as Kudur-Mabug, meaning 'The Son of (or The servant of) Mabug' and in Canaan as Kudur-Lagamar – the Son of Lagamar. Both titles were correct, he might have had other titles too, they did not confuse anybody in their time. They left the confusion to unfortunate historians.

The primary aim of this exercise is to decide whether a story, which is generally accepted as a legend of mythology, the story of the Patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, can be seen as part of real history or not. The decision about the question should be done here, in connection with the story of the Elamite war. After all, the story of the Patriarchs is not that type of story of which one expects to find traces in some Middle Eastern archive. The main story of the Book of Genesis is one of a family: How one finds a wife, how wives get babies, how to resolve problems among siblings and how babies receive inheritance? It is a real human story, but not the type one finds in royal archives.

The names of the Patriarchs are common enough but their actions were at most belonging to a small barbarian tribe, attempting to find a place to settle in Canaan. The story, if it was indeed a story and not a legend, was important to the tribe, but it certainly was not high politics.

The war, or raid, as it was described in Chapter 14 of Genesis, is another matter. It is a story that ought to be represented in the archives. Even by granting the fact that the events occurred some four millennia ago, and that most of the archives are still covered by sand somewhere, and even most of the tablets recovered from the existing archives were not deciphered yet, there must be something known to justify the decision for historicity of the story.

Historical research must have a basic honesty. Even the most intensive wish to prove something cannot replace missing facts on the ground. If nothing can be found about the story of the chapter in the archives, then the story should be declared as pure legend, at least until some new evidence comes to light.

This is the reason why this chapter is considered a pivotal one in the book, and why a great effort was made to collect and analyze all what is known about the subject. The readers, and the author himself, should be convinced beyond any reasonable doubt, that the decision, in whatever direction it falls, is correct and objective.

Elam and Chedorlaomer

Elam was an ancient state, shown on Map 1 in the lower right corner. It lies on the eastern shore of the Persian Gulf. The Elamites were probably the aborigine inhabitants of the area. They are assumed to have been Dravidians, who lived, and are still living, in the south of India. Today they are called Tamils and are well known because of the war in Sri Lanka.

According to Chapter 14, it was an Elamite king, Chedorlaomer who led a coalition of 4 kings against the 5 kings of the Cities of the Plain. The Cities of the Plain were cities along the lower valley of the Jordan and around the Dead Sea. It is true that Elam had no suzerainty over Canaan and the kings of the cities did not have to pay tribute directly to Elam, but it seems that at the time when Abraham entered Canaan, Elam held suzerainty over Babylon, and as such it was involved in Canaanite affairs.

According to an inscription of Assurbanipal, the grandson of Sennacherib, his armies conquered Susa, the capital of Elam, and recovered a statue of the goddess Nana, which was carried away from Babylon by an Elamite king, named Kudur-Nankhundi. The Assyrian conquest was in 660 BC., therefore 1635 years before it puts the Elamite conquest at about 2280

BC.⁵ Babylon was relieved from the Elamite yoke by Hammurabi, who

ruled in the 17th century BC. At the time of the war against the Cities of the Plain, the Elamites were the suzerains in Babylon.

The tablet of Assurbanipal is not the only one mentioning possible Elamite connection with Canaan. It was reported both by Eberhard Schrader and St. Chad Boscawen⁶ that an Elamite king, called Kudur-Mabug, claimed the title of Addu-Martu, literally 'Father of the Land of the Setting Sun' and also the title of 'Father of the Land of the Amorites'.

There was one more tablet found that mentions three out of the four names appearing in Chapter 14, in the same order as in the Old Testament. The tablet is among a find, called the Spartoli tablets. It was translated by an English scholar, Theophilus Pinches.⁷ The name of Chedorlaomer was written on that tablet as Kudur-Lahmil, probably another of the titles of Kudur-Mabug.

Amraphel of Shinar

The second king of the coalition was Amraphel of Shinar, which is the biblical name of Babylon. Accordingly, scholars were looking for a ruler of Babylon with that name, or close to it, to allow for the transliteration of the cuneiform to alphabetic writing. There was a time when scholars thought that Amraphel was the Hebrew transliteration of Hammurabi, as it was explained above. Hammurabi had indeed relations with Elam. At the beginning of his rule, which was between 1726 and 1686 BC., Elam was Babylon's suzerain and Hammurabi held his post in the name of Elam. Eventually, he rebelled and freed Babylon from Elam. So, at the beginning of his rule, he could have participated in the venture on Elam's side. However, the dating of Hammurabi does not fit the dating of Abraham, which is put by most scholars in the 21st century BC. Because of the dating and also because on philological grounds, most modern scholars think that the identification with Hammurabi is unlikely.⁸

Joseph P. Free has pointed out that the Babylonian equivalent to the Hebrew Amraphel, could have been Amur-pi-el, who was one of the rulers of Mari, or Amurru-ipul (the god Amurru paid back).

It seems that the solution to the question of Amraphel should be simple. In the 21st century BC., the estimated period of the war, Mesopotamia was under Elamite control. It was also divided into two kingdoms, the northern part Babylon, the biblical Shinar, and the southern part Larsa, the biblical

Ellasar, The 'el' is the Hebrew form of 'alu' – Babylonian for city, so Ellasar is the 'City of Larsa'. Chedorlaomer, the suzerain of Mesopotamia, made his raid upon the cities of the Plain, in that capacity. Looking at it from his point of view, it was not so much a war, but a punishment raid, assisted by two of his viceroys, in Babylon and Larsa, and by mercenaries, led by Tidal of the Goim.

Arioch of Ellasar

Two possibilities were found in the archives that could identify the name in Chapter 14. Both of them could have been associates of Chedorlaomer.

The first possibility is Eri-Aku from the city of Larsa. There are two inscriptions that identify Eri-Aku as the ruler of Larsa and the son of Kudur-Mabug, who was at that time the suzerain of Mesopotamia. As Mesopotamia was divided into two kingdoms, Babylon and Larsa, he appointed his son as lord over one of the kingdoms.⁹

There are scholars who do not accept that identification and suggest the identification with Ariwuk of Mari. Ariwuk is a Hurrian name and is mentioned in the Mari tablets. This identification does not explain Ellasar, while the first identification does.¹⁰

Tidal of nations

The identification of this king is probably the most interesting part of the search after the historicity of the story. Amraphel, Arioch and Chedorlaomer are identified with Babylon, Larsa and Elam. Somehow Tidal is identified as a king without a land. In Hebrew the expression 'Goyim' means 'other people' in the plural. So, the other three kings could point to a territory and claim that it is theirs; they each had a kingdom. Only Tidal was a king of some undefined nations. Not even a single nation, but of many nations. It is definitely worth to be investigated in depth.

As far as the name Tidal is concerned, there are a number of candidates for that name. Some historians thought that Tidal was Tudhaliya, the name of five kings of the Hittites¹¹ while others connected the name to an Amorite chief named Tidnum or Tud-Ghula.

The Amorite connection is not very plausible, as it does not give solution to the 'nations'. Surely, in the case of an Amorite chief, it would have been written as Tidal the Amorite. Moreover, as the war was against the Cities of

the Plains, who themselves were Amorites, it does not make much sense that an Amorite chief should lead 'nations' against other Amorites

The first choice, that of Tudhaliya, is much more plausible. There were five Hittite kings with that name; the first among them was in the approximate period of Abraham. He might have organized mercenaries belonging to various Indo-European tribes, hence the 'nations'. The mercenaries might have belonged to the horde of Umman-Manda, an Indo-European conglomeration of tribes, probably Scythians. The name Umman-Manda was used in old Babylonian times. Naram-Sin, the Grandson of Sargon I, had a bad experience with them.

Indo-European tribes were wandering around the Middle East since at least from early third millennium BC, probably even earlier. This, in addition to the Hittites, who were native people of Anatolia, who remained there after the disaster of the Euxine Lake. The Indo-European connection definitely would explain the use of the word 'goyim'. The writers of the Old Testament knew very well the ethnic composition and the names of the countries of the Middle East. Indeed, the list of Noah's descendants was the limit of their knowledge. For them, the marauding tribes, coming from the north through the Caucasus, were 'nations' without specific names. If they were indeed Indo-European mercenaries, then it was reasonable that they were hired and led by the king of the Hittites, who at least could talk to them and knew their habits. So, if Chedorlaomer needed mercenaries, he hired them through the Hittites.

Summary

After analyzing the names and the historical circumstances, the following historical narrative emerges:



The kings of the Cities of the Plain, those from the lower valley of the Jordan, were paying tribute to Babylon. Because of some reason they stopped paying the tribute. The tribute was probably in the form of bitumen, mined around the Dead Sea, the 'slime pits', and it was a very desirable commodity in Mesopotamia. Balsam from the plantations around Jericho could have been included too. It is known from classical times that there were extensive plantations of balsam around Jericho, which were the private properties of Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt. It is possible that they had to deliver copper too, from the copper-mines of the bay of Eilat.



Mesopotamia was under Elamite suzerainty at that time, and moreover, it was divided into two kingdoms, Babylon and Larsa. The kings of the two kingdoms called their suzerain, whose name might have been Kudur-Mabug and one of his titles was Kudur-Lagamar. He was also the father of the king of Larsa, whose name was Eri-Aku, or Arioch in Hebrew.



In order to increase his power, Kudur-Mabug hired Indo-European, probably Scythian mercenaries, through the good office of the king of the Hittites. The use of Scythian mercenaries seems to have been an accepted practice, before and after this particular war. In later times, they were instrumental in the destruction of the new Assyrian Empire, as they were earlier in the downfall of the dynasty of Sargon. They were familiar with the area. The Greek name of Beit-Shan, the main crossing on the Jordan, was Scythopolis – the town of the Scythians.



It is possible that the allied expedition was more of an armed sortie of tax collection and not a major war. The route, which the allied forces were taking, revealed it. They did not come from Babylon directly through the desert, but came through Syria, which was a longer road. The major part of the expedition was probably pack animals, to carry back the tribute, so water for the animals must have been a logistical consideration. That they started the return journey near the Red Sea shows that copper from the mines there must have been part of the plan.



The ease by which Abraham and his allies succeeded to surprise the raiders north of Damascus is also easier understood if one considers that it was a tribute collection and not a major war.

There was another objection to the possibility of the intervention of Abraham and his allies. The objection was that 318 men from Abraham, and equal numbers from the allies, were insufficient to challenge a major army. When considering this objection, one has to take into consideration that it was in the 21st century BC, before the period of the mass armies, which arrived about a millennium later. Even as late as the great battle of Megiddo, in 1479 BC., the army of Pharaoh Thotmes III killed 83 of the enemy and captured 740 prisoners. So, the numbers of people Abraham and his allies had were equal to the task.

Thus, judging from the participants, the route taken, and the numbers involved, it seems that the story is more or less an accurate rendering of some obscure tribute collecting expedition. It was certainly not a major war, otherwise there would be more traces in the archives. Based on the

narrative, which can be supported by historical, non-biblical evidences, the story can be accepted as historical. Other stories from the third millennium BC, based on less documentation, were accepted as histories.

There is one more point here. As far as it can be seen from the Old Testament itself, Abraham was not a Semite. His home country was to the north of the dividing line between the Semites and the non-Semites. According to Robert Graves he was an Armenian, according the Hittites of Hebron, he was one of them, even a great prince, but it is also possible that he was a Hurrian. If he was a Hittite, then here he fought against a force led by a Hittite king. In order to understand the situation he was in, it is worth while to remember one of the verses of the Rig-Veda.

The Rig-Veda tells about a war between the Aryans and the Dasyus. The first were the Indo-European invaders and the last the aborigines. There is no consensus in this, as there are scholars who claim that the Dasyus were the descendants, probably mixture, of an earlier Indo-European invasion. One of the verses warns the Aryans that they have to fight against the Dasyus with one hand, and with the other they have to defend themselves against a new wave of other Indo-Aryan invaders, who might stab them in the back. It is possible that there was some sort of solidarity, based upon similar languages, customs and religion, but not when it came to conquest and booty. Then everybody was for himself, and against everybody else

Notes

1. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythic Past*, op.cit. pp. 130 – 136
2. Idem.,pp.132 – 122
3. Merrill F. Unger, op.cit. p.19
4. John van Seters, op.cit.,p.115 is the leading opponent for accepting the story as history. There are many, who are willing to give at least the benefit of the doubt. Among them, Merrill F. Unger, op.cit., pp. 25,117 , Wenham, op.cit. ,pp. 319 – 320,Custance, op.cit.,p.9/20, W.F. Albright, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, op.cit.,p.133
5. Arthur C. Custance, op.cit.,p.10/20 quotes Eberhard Schroeder, *The Cuneiform Inscriptions and the Old Testament*, Williams and Moorgate,London, 1885, p.122
6. Eberhard Schroeder, op.cit.,p.122, ref.17, W. St.Chad Boscawen, *Historical Evidences of the Migrations of Abraham*, Tr. Victoria Institute 20, 1888, p.100, ref.4, Joseph P. Free, op.cit, p.53

7. Robert L. Bradshaw, op.cit.,p.9/13; Arthur C. Custance, op.cit.p.12/20; T.G. Pinches, *The Old Testament in the Light of Historical Records and Legends of Assyria and Babylon*, SPCK, London, 1908, pp.45-65
8. Gordon J. Wenham, op.cit. p.308, Joseph P. Free, op.cit., p.52, n.15, Robert L. Bradshaw, op.cit. p.3/13
9. Idem, p.9/13, Arthur C. Custance, op.cit. p.10/20; T.G.Pinches, op.cit.,p.219
10. Joseph P. Free, op.cit.,p.52, Gordon J. Wenham, op.cit.p.308
11. Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.,p.141; Gordon J. Wenham, op.cit., ibid; Joseph P. Free, op.cit, ibid

THE PATRIARCHS








Family Affairs

The story of the Book of Genesis is that of a single family, with their herds, retainers and tents, which left their home somewhere in the north of Mesopotamia, in the valley of the Balikh, east of Euphrates, and moved to Canaan. The Old Testament presents this fact as divine instruction. There is no way to prove or disprove it. As it was said many times, one does not prove theological arguments. One accepts them, or not. But then, there is no need to touch the question at all. The story is an important historical document, and no argument for or against its divinity could change its basic importance. So, the story is presented in its basic format. The theological parts of the Old Testament are disregarded here, except when they are part of the historical narrative, and similarly disregarded the mythological parts of the story.

There are many obvious mythological arguments in the story, especially in the matter of the ages of the participants. So, the treatment of the story will disregard the fact that Ishmael was sixteen when Abraham sent him away into the wilderness, and it is difficult to accept that Hagar could hoist a sixteen years old boy unto her shoulder and walk away. It will also be disregarded that according the Bible Jacob was about a hundred when his mother decided that he had slim marriage prospects in Canaan.

The basic story, which is evaluated in this book, is the story of a family wandering from the north to the south, in search of a new home. Apart of the story of their wanderings, there are the common problems of all families, that of marriages, children, conflicts and feuds inside and outside the family, and deaths. As far as the simple story goes, the plot of the Book of Genesis is trivial, and exactly that is what makes it probably the most important stories of early civilizational times. No heroic posturing, as in the poems of Homer, and no endless philosophical wandering, as in the books of the Avesta and the Rig-Veda.

This chapter analyses one by one the subjects that are purely simple family affairs. They are:

-  The adoption of an heir by Abraham
-  Wives and sisters
-  The story of Sarah and Hagar
-  The purchase of the burial cave
-  Marriages in the family

It should be added here, that although the stories are about simple family affairs, they contain priceless information about the possible period of the stories and also about the possible ethnic origin of the family.

The adoption of an heir

Chapter 15 of the Book of Genesis starts with a dialogue between God and Abraham, in which Abraham complains about being childless, and that he is compelled to adopt an heir. God answers to his complaints that he will have children of his own and many descendants. The rest of the chapter is about the renewal of the Covenant.

The parts about the question of adoption are confused. It is not entirely certain who is the intended heir, and whether that adoption was already done, or is it only contemplated?

The exact translation of the line Chap. 15.2 is the following:

"A son of my household is Damascus Eliezer. As you have not given me a heir, a son of my house will inherit me."

The Authorized Version translates the same sentence as:

"Lord God, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house if this Eliezer of Damascus...Behold, to me thou hast given no seed, and, lo, one born in mine house is mine heir."

There is an obvious confusion here. First, it is not clearly stated that Eliezer of Damascus is that son of the household who will inherit Abraham, and second it is not stated whether the adoption was already done, or is it only contemplated. It is a difficult question. There are some that suggested that the sentence does not mean the town of Damascus, but it is an Aramaic word "Dameshek" meaning "of my household". It is a farfetched

assumption to bring an Aramaic expression into a context of late 3rd millennium BC; it is an anachronism. Most of the scholars who studied the problem, decided on the meaning:

"My heir is Eliezer of Damascus, a son of my household."^{[1](#)}

Most of the scholars also accepted that it was a common practice in the 2nd and 3rd millennium BC for a childless couple to adopt a 'son' who looked after his foster parents and in time inherited from them. The arrangement could be reversed to a certain degree if a real heir was subsequently born. The adopted son could be a stranger or one of the household, even a slave.^{[2](#)}

There are a number of weak points in the consensus. The first is that Abraham was a man of substance. If he could field 318 armed retainers against the coalition of 4 Eastern Kings, he could have taken care of his old age. He was a rich and powerful man. Second, he had a family. Lot, his nephew was near him, and he had family back in Haran too. Third, Abraham was not barren, Sarah was. He fathered Ishmael with Hagar, and he had 6 more sons from his second wife, Keturah, whom she married after Sarah's death. If he was a Semite with an approved custom of having more than one wife, then the barrenness of one wife could not have been a cause for lack of an heir. Rachel was also barren at the beginning of her marriage, still Jacob did not become desperate. So, Abraham should not have problems of heirs, if he was a Semite.

In the Semitic Middle East, it was a common practice then, and in modern times too, that a man can marry more than one wife. For Muslims the limit is four. This practice can solve problems of barrenness, provided that it is not from the husband's side. Abraham did not choose that solution. He had a single wife, Sarah, and a second wife after her death. His son, Isaac, also had a single wife. The practice of polygamy started in the family only in the generation of the grandsons. Both Jacob and Esau married two wives. There seems to be a process here that ought to be investigated.

The previous chapters stated a hypothesis that the tribe or clan of Abraham originated in northern Mesopotamia, north of the dividing line between the Semitic and the non-Semitic world. He was a pastoral nomad with large herds of cattle. He wandered south to reach Canaan, sometimes at the end of the 3rd millennium BC, when that country was mostly depopulated because of climatic conditions. He traveled on a trodden path; people

similar to him arrived to Canaan in previous generations, settled down and became local people of substance. It cannot be known how far they traveled along the road to total assimilation. They must have had contacts with people in the old country, as they recognized Abraham as an important person when negotiating with him for the sale of the burial cave.

However, judging from the contents of Chapter 13, the Hittites who settled in the hill country of Canaan, gave up their earlier way of life and at least in this respect, were in the process of assimilating to the local people. If they had remained with their herds of cattle, then in addition to the strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot, other herdsmen too would have joined the fray. However, the chapter tells only about the Canaanite and the Perizzite.

It seems that with Abraham and his descendants there was a similar process. Abraham has kept to the old customs, so did his son. Among others, they had a single wife, they were monogamous. It seems that in the third generation the assimilation has advanced to such a degree that they did not look back to the customs of the old country. However, Abraham was the first generation and he kept the customs. What were those customs?

It was shown that there was some confusion in the ethnic composition of the upper Euphrates valley. At the time of Abraham, and before him too, there was a mixture of Hittites and Hurrians. The first was an Indo-European tribe that separated from the main body of the proto-Indo-Europeans after the deluge of the Euxine Lake. The second was a tribe of Caucasian origin. The Hurrians were the main bulk of the population, while the Hittites and probably other Indo-European tribes formed the local aristocracy. As the territory had an ethnic mixture, it is probable that Abraham, and his contemporaries, had traditions and social customs from both elements of the ethnic mixture. Indeed, so it was.

If we wish to examine that question of adoption, we should look at the customs of the Hittites and the Hurrians, and not the customs of the Semites. Although the Hittites separated from the main body of the Indo-Europeans by three millennia, the basic religious and social customs survived bigger temporal and spatial distances than that. The customs of marriages, citizenship and adoption remained identical as far away from each other as the Romans, Greeks and Indians, which was far greater distance than the Hittites. As for temporal distance, the present western Civilization still has the same principles that Abraham was considering in his time.

The attitude of the Indo-Europeans was that marriage is monogamous and sacred, and only a male offspring of the sacred marriage can continue the family. The Indians said:

"He to whom nature has denied a son can adopt one, so that the funeral ceremonies may not cease."³

The Greeks had the same attitude. There is a curious plea of an Athenian orator in a case where the legitimacy of the son's adoption was question. The orator decided to make the plea in the name of the deceased father who adopted the son:

"If you annul my adoption, you will leave Menendes, who is dead, without a son; and consequently no one will perform the sacrifices in his honor, no one will offer him the funeral repast, and thus he will be without worship."⁴

For Hittites and Indo-Europeans in general, the question was not whether Abraham and Sarah will have someone to take care of them in their old age, but whether there will be someone to ensure the continuity of the family, and conduct the necessary rites to worship the ancestors of the family, called 'manes' by the Romans. It is not known under what name Abraham and his family knew the ancestors, the Old Testament calls them 'teraphim', but according to his belief, the ancestors were part of the family and they had rights as any other member of the family.

According to Fustel de Coulanges, the primary religion of the Indo-Europeans was the worship of the ancestors and that of the family hearth, with the sacred fire, which had to be maintained at all cost. In historical Rome, the sacred fire was maintained by the Vestal Virgins, who continued in their task long into Christian times. The religion of the ancestors, which had its own rites and prayers in each family, was shaped in very early times. Probably, it occurred when the Indo-Europeans still lived in their homeland, somewhere in southern Russia or Central Asia. It was an early development, possibly even before the Neolithic Revolution. All subsequent religions were only a superficial gloss over the basic belief. Indeed, the social concepts of Western Civilization are still based upon those beliefs. Monogamous marriages, continuation of the family by a firstborn son, etc. are still the base of many of the western practices. It seems that they were the bases of Abraham's actions too.


If it is accepted that Abraham was guided by the principles of his origin, then the problem of the inheritance becomes clearer. The worship of the


ancestors and the continuity of the family were the main principles of the domestic religion; the question of the family property belonged to the same category. Abraham as Terah's firstborn son had the responsibility for the survival of the family, he had the control of the family property too. Lot had his own religion, inherited from his father. He had no right to anything Abraham owned, unless Abraham adopted him. The right to the property, and the religious duty to worship the ancestors, was always of the legal heir, or whoever could prove that he is the legal heir. Until late historical times, neither Romans nor Greeks or Indians had the right to prepare a will. The stewardship of the property and the accompanying religious duties could have settled only by religious principles. There were strict rules, and no human whim could interfere with them


However, Abraham did not have to go through with the adoption. He was promised a son of his own, and eventually he received one. That was a veritable 'deus ex machina'.

Wives and Sisters

There are three stories in the Book of Genesis that are nearly identical. All three concern the Patriarchs and their wives, and all three put the Patriarchs in less than flattering posture. It happened only with the first two Patriarchs, who were monogamous. As in the previous discussion about the case of adoption, marriage, and inheritance in general, here too there is a hidden meaning that ought to be investigated. The three stories are:

 When Abraham visited Egypt, he has hidden the fact that Sarah is his wife and presented her as his sister. (Gen. 12.10-20).

 Abraham sojourned in Gerar (in the south of Canaan, between Gaza and Beer-Sheba.) He told Abimelech, the king of Gerar, that Sarah is his sister. The beauty of Sarah smote Abimelech, so he sent to summon her. (Gen. 20. 1-5). Eventually the problem was solved by divine intervention. However, the gist of the matter was that Abraham said of Sarah: She is my sister, and Sarah said of Abraham: he is my brother.

 Similarly to Abraham's experience in Gerar, Isaac went to Gerar, claiming that Rebecca, his wife, is really his sister. One day, Abimelech, the king of Gerar (probably the son of Abimelech of Abraham) looked out the window of his palace and saw Isaac behaving with Rebecca in a definitely unbrotherly way. (Gen. 26. 6-9).

There are three stories here with a common theme. A relationship of husband-wife is disguised as a relationship of brother-sister. The causes for the disguises were identical. In all three cases the husbands were afraid that the beauty of their wives will cause problems with the rulers of the places where they were staying; once in Egypt and twice in Gerar, in the south of Canaan.

The same story is told three times. It can mean that either it was a 'topos', one of those common themes, like virgin birth, exposure after birth, persecution by an old king, etc., so beloved by ancient storytellers, or they indeed happened so, and the happenings were brought on by some ancient custom and by similar external circumstances. After all, the Patriarchs were chiefs of wandering pastoral clans, and in their wandering with their herds, retainers and families, they must have encountered many similar welcomes.

The first possibility that the stories were a retelling of some existing 'topos', motivated by the storytellers wish to insert an interesting episode' is not really feasible. First, Abraham might have been vary in Egypt; after all he was a chief of a wandering tribe of nomads and his opponent might have been Pharaoh himself. But it certainly was not the case in Gerar. The king of Gerar was a local chieftain of a not very important town. Abraham was a chief of a tribe, who some time before his visit to Gerar led a coalition against the 4 Eastern kings. It is doubtful that a local chief of a small town could match Abraham's strength. In this respect, Abraham had not much to fear to expose Sarah as his wife.

There is another possible reason why the storytellers inserted the subject of the fear of exposure. Marrying one's sister was one of the strongest incest taboos of the Jews. As it seems to be more than probable that they did not know the reasons why Abraham and Isaac have presented their wives as sisters, they had to invent some plausible story to cover any possible charge of incest.

It seems that the root of the stories should be looked for elsewhere. According to a number of scholars, led by E. A. Speiser and Ignatius Hunt, there was an ancient Hurrian custom, of adopting one's wife as one's sister. In Hurrian society the bonds of such a double union were the strongest and regarded as most solemn when the wife had also the juridical status of a sister.⁵ It was a practice not shared by the Hittites nor by the Semites. They were known to the Hurrians and to those who used the Hurrian practices. It was shown that the area of Haran and Ur was a territory with a solid Hurrian population, and with Hittite aristocracy.

There is a practice, known in Islamic law, which is known as a temporary divorce, or separation as the concept is known in the Western world. The Islamic formula for such a case is to say before witnesses: 'You are my sister' and the declaration would temporarily suspend the marriage.⁶

According to Hurrian concepts, this type of marriage was much stronger than marriage between two strangers, who did not fortify their legal position by an adoption. So, if it was indeed the case with Abraham and Isaac, then the statement 'She is my sister' was certainly correct from the legal point of view. Of course, even in this case they might have deemed it useful to hide the real situation. Neither Pharaoh nor the king of Gerar might have been aware of Hurrian legal concepts, so they might have accepted it as an incestuous union. It might not have disturbed Pharaoh as their concept of inheritance compelled the Pharaohs to marry their sister, but it was certainly incestuous to the king of Gerar.

Not every scholar accepted the solution of Speiser, Hunt and others.

Gordon J. Wenham⁷ lists a number of scholars who objected to that interpretation because of two main reasons.

They claimed that the collators of the Book of Genesis did not understand the patriarchal marriages that way and they also doubted the validity of the Nuzi documents on which Speiser based his ruling. This book is not prepared to argue on scientific grounds about the validity of clay tablets, but it has much to say about later interpretations and editorial license.

There are a number of books about the subject of the Old Testament. They seem to be a variation of the Holocaust denial; they certainly seem to be motivated by the same basic antagonism. They can be categorized into two types.

The first is the crude type. It states that there were no Jewish people in Palestine at all; it is all fabrication and somehow Christianity grew out of a rock without any Jewish roots. The second approach is subtler. It says in effect that 'yes, there was a Jewish people, which somehow congregated in Palestine after the Babylonian captivity, and the Old Testament was created by the leaders of that people, who were excellent storytellers but had no knowledge about the past, and not much of their own period.

As far as the first approach is concerned, one cannot argue with it. It is on the level of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion and on those of the absolute deniers of the Holocaust. The second is subtler, but motivated exactly as the

first. Here, at least, there is place for an argument, although it seems to be a futile exercise. Still, the material for counterarguments is accumulating with each new excavation and decipherment of more clay tablets.

There seems to be no doubt that there was some editorial process when the canon of the Old Testament was established. It certainly must have removed a number of contradictions, and leaving there sufficient quantities to cause problems to modern scholars. So, when they found the stories with the wife-sister relationship, and had no knowledge of the underlying legal principles, they changed the stories to make them more palatable to their contemporaries.

However, they left in the final version of the Old Testament many details, which in their time was unintelligible and very incorrect. Why they left one and corrected the second? It is possible that to leave for the patriarch an unexplained wife-sister relationship would expose them to an incestuous practice of marriage. This they could not leave. The other invalid data, as far as their knowledge about the world was concerned, would not expose the patriarchs to unnatural practices.

In Chapter 10 of the Book of Genesis, the descendants of Noah were presented. It was the picture of the ethnic composition of the world, as it was at the time when the Old Testament was composed. In that list of peoples there were a number of statements unsuitable to the 1st millenium BC.

According to the list, Mizraim (Egypt in Hebrew) was one of the sons of Ham, which was accepted even in their time, but so were Canaan, the Philistim and the Caphtorim too. The contemporaries of the editorial process knew the Canaanim and the Plishtim very well. They were in close, although not very friendly, relation with them. They were able to communicate with them without translators, and they knew that they were the descendants of Shem. About Caphtor (Crete) also there were no doubts. They were the descendants of Yapheth, they spoke Greek as they do today.

Only now, in the second half of the 20th century, it was discovered that the Old Testament was right and all the others, from the contemporaries of editors of the Old Testament until a short while ago, were wrong.

Only in the 60s and the 70s of the 20th century was it found that at the time of the Patriarchs, the people of the eastern littoral of the Mediterranean, including Plishtim, Canaan, Sidon, etc. were of Egyptian origin, and so were in Cyprus and Crete too.⁸ Not from the Hamitic Egyptians, but

connected to those from the Delta of the Nile, who spoke a northwestern Semitic dialect. As the ethnic assignment of the Old Testament was done upon territorial belonging, and not upon race or language, then they were indeed Hamitic.

After the completion of the decipherment of the Minoan B writing, which showed that the language was a proto-Greek dialect, they deciphered the Minoan A script too, and found that the language was a northwestern Semitic dialect. The Phaistos disc is still waiting for decipherment, but it is already clear that it has a clear relation to the Egyptian hieroglyphs.

The example above shows that accepting the Old Testament, as a contemporary document with priceless historical data is a correct decision. There are still unsolved questions but as the example above shows, it is a question of time, until modern science will be able to find answers to the outstanding questions.

The story of Sarah and Hagar

Despite the divine promise, Sarah was still barren. The weight of being childless must have been heavy, but it was heavier on Abraham. He had the responsibility to ensure the continuity of the family, and time was slipping by. No wonder that he was contemplating to adopt an heir. He had concubines and had sons from them too, but according his principles those sons could not be his heirs. Indeed, when the time came, he gave them gifts and sent them away.

They both had a problem that was well understood and well documented. For a woman to remain childless was a stigma; it is so even today in that part of the world. When Sarah decided to offer Abraham, Hagar, her Egyptian handmaid as a surrogate mother, she followed Semitic and Hurrian practices that were even codified in laws. It was an accepted practice in Nuzi, which was solidly Hurrian, it was so in the Semitic world of their time.⁹

The story of Hagar is rather confused in the Book of Genesis.. Seemingly, there were two versions of the story and the editors used both versions. In the first version, after the union with Abraham, Hagar became haughty with her mistress, who dealt hardly with her, so she fled to the desert. An angel of the Lord found her and informed her that she is pregnant, so she returned. In time she gave birth to Ishmael, who grew up in Abraham's household. He was circumcised together with the whole household, as a sign of the Covenant. He was thirteen when he was circumcised.

After the new covenant with the Lord, Sarah conceived and in due time Isaac was born. After Isaac grew and was weaned, the old problems with Hagar, and her son, surfaced again. This time Sarah demanded that Hagar and Ishmael to be expelled, saying:

"Cast out this bondswoman and her son; for the son of this bondswoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac." (Gen. 21.10)

Hagar was expelled to the wilderness, but was saved by the Lord, as Ishmael was also Abraham's son, and as such he was destined to be a father of nations.

So far is the story in the Old Testament. It ought to be examined how the story stands up against the prevailing legal practices of the period.

It seems that to search for surrogate mothers was a common practice. It happened to Sarah, to Rachel, when she was barren at the beginning of her marriage, even to Leah, when she had a kind of lull in her childbearing abilities. (Gen. 30.9) The practice was common in the Middle East, where the ability to bear male children was, and still is, the primary requirement from a wife.

However, the expulsion of Hagar was definitely against the various laws and practices. The laws of Nuzi, of Hammurabi, and of Lipit-Ishtar of Assyria, considered human nature and realized that the sight of a fertile slavegirl may be an irritation to the barren wife, so they added relevant provisions to the laws. The Codex of Laws of Nuzi states:

1. A barren wife must provide her husband with a surrogate, normally the wife's slave girl.
2. The status of the slavegirl and her offspring is protected against the jealousy or whims of either the wife or the husband.

The birth of Ishmael and later expulsion with his mother were highly irregular. First, in normal circumstances, when the wife brought a slavegirl to her husband to conceive a child, and when the child was born, it was immediately placed on the wife's knees, so that the child's first vision would be the wife's face and not of the biological mother. It happened that way with Rachel, but the Old Testament gives no confirmation that it so happened with Hagar and Ishmael.

Second, Hagar's expulsion was irregular and even illegal. The laws have

foreseen the possibility that after having a child from a surrogate mother, the barrenness of the wife may cease and bear a legitimate child. This has happened with Abraham and Sarah. In this case, the legitimate child will be the 'firstborn', as it was with Isaac, but the rights of the son of the surrogate mother were safeguarded. Moreover, the surrogate woman could not be expelled, even for cause. Paragraph 146 of the Code of Hammurabi reads:

"...If a man takes a priestess and she gives to her husband a maid-servant and she bears children, and afterwards that maid-servant would take rank with her mistress, because she has born children, her mistress may not sell her for money, but she may reduce her to bondage and count her among the female slaves."¹⁰

Priestesses were probably allowed to marry but not to have children. The Code of Lipit-Ishtar of Assyria ruled that the child of the surrogate mother was to become an heir, but the concubine could not dwell in the same home as the principal wife:

"...as long as his wife is living, the concubine (who had brought forth a child to a man whose wife was sterile) shall not dwell in the house with his wife."¹¹

Sarah caused Hagar and her child to be expelled, which was against all customs. Moreover, God gave Abraham permission to allow Sarah to do what she wished with Hagar. What could have been the cause to bring about the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael? After all, Ishmael was already sixteen and Isaac three. Sarah did put up with Hagar in her position as mother of Abraham's child for sixteen years, and with Ishmael as a possible challenger for her son's position, for three years. What brought on the sudden boil?

"And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking..."(Gen.21.8-9)

This is how the Authorized Version of the Bible translated the sentence. The Hebrew word that was translated as 'mocking' is a curious use in Hebrew. It is 'm'tzachek', meaning make someone laugh or happy. The root of the word is 'tz ch k' – meaning laugh. The grammatical format 'm'tzachek' is rare, unused in modern Hebrew, and only very seldom in the Old Testament. The expression is used twice in the Book of Genesis. Once, in Chap. 19.15 when describing the attitude of the sons-in-law of Lot when

warning them to get out of the city, where the same meaning 'mocking' is used. The second is in Chap. 26.8, when describing what Abimelech, king of Gerar saw when looking out of his window. There the translation is that Isaac was 'sporting' with his wife, who was introduced to the king as his sister. Here is an expression with two meanings: one meaning is to make someone laughable, i.e. to mock, and the second is to make someone laugh, or to make someone happy. In the context of a three-year-old child, both meanings can cause for the parents to be inflamed and to act as they did. There are modern scholars who put meanings in the use of the word, but there is no need for it. There is no way to find out what meaning was intended.

The purchase of the burial cave

>Chapter 23 of the Book of Genesis tells the story of Abraham buying the Cave of Machpela in Hebron to be used as the burial cave of the family. The first to be buried in the cave was Sarah, who died at the age of 127.

This chapter has some significance in that it was the first purchase of territory made by Abraham in Canaan. Buying a burial cave meant that the center of the family was from then on in Canaan. Abraham and Isaac were buried there, so were Rebecca and Jacob, who died in Egypt and was brought back to Hebron to be buried with his ancestors.

The purchase itself had two important points. The first was that the Hittites of Hebron, where Abraham was looking for a burial cave, recognized and greeted him as a 'mighty prince among us' and the second that they sold him the burial cave, together with field where the cave was located. The sale was at an exorbitant price. Abraham paid 400 shekels for the field and the cave, while Omri paid 6000 shekels for the whole city of Samaria. (I Kings, 16.24)

There are scholars who put importance to the fact that Ephron the Hittite refused to sell the cave alone, but only together with the surrounding field. They claimed that it was caused by the wish of Ephron to be freed of Hittite feudal responsibilities. According to Hittite laws (Sections 39,46 and 47), there were feudal obligations on fields, even if part of the field was sold. Only a complete sale freed the previous owner from paying taxes or doing military service. Hittite law regarded the land itself as producing service to the king and not to the owner.^{[12](#)}

It seems that there is a mistake in these assumptions. It is entirely possible that under the rule of the Hittite kings, those were the laws and the customs.

However, the Hittites of Hebron, and Hebron itself, were not under the rule of Hittite kings, not then and not ever, although they might have used Hittite customs amongst them. As far as the Hittite authorities were concerned, if one can speak about authorities at such an early period, the Hittites of the highlands of Canaan were emigrants or expatriates, who left their country for greener pastures or for less taxes and obligations. If the land had obligation when owned by Ephron, then it had the same obligations when owned by Abraham. There is no sign of that. It is doubtful that at that time, anybody paid tax without the presence of an armed authority to enforce it. There was no such authority in Canaan, neither of the Hittites nor of anybody else. It was a straightforward commercial transaction with a good measure of oriental haggling.

Marriages in the Family

The tribe of Abraham arrived to Canaan from the north and settled down in the uplands of the country, somewhere between Hebron and Beer-Sheba. After Sarah's death Abraham bought a plot of land with a burial cave. The first member of the family to be buried in the cave was Sarah, but eventually the rest of the family, including Abraham himself, was buried there. Abraham married again after Sarah's death. The name of his second wife was Ketura. They had six sons together. However, Abraham's attitude to his children was consistent. Isaac was his firstborn and the designated head of the family after Abraham. According the principle of the primogenitura, Isaac was the heir and the next head of the family. The rest of his sons, from his second wife and from his concubines, were given gifts and sent away eastwards. Chap.25.6 says:

"...sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, unto the east country".

Presumably, eastward meant east of the river Jordan. But before that, when he was already old, he wanted to arrange a suitable marriage for Isaac. As he did not want Isaac to marry anyone from Canaan, he sent one of his trusted servant to his kindred in the old country to find a wife for his son; that in order to prevent Isaac marry any girl from Canaan. There are two important points here:



His son's wife should come from his own kindred back from the old country



His concept of marriage remained that of a single wife, the form of the sacred marriage of the Indo-Europeans.

The servant reached the 'city of Nahor' and met Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel and the granddaughter of Nahor, Abraham's brother. It was family, but not near enough to be prohibited. The servant has returned with Rebecca. That was the story of the continuation of the family in the first generation after Abraham.

The story of the second marriage was far more complex. Isaac and Rebecca had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. As they were male twins, the law of primogeniture could not be easily applied. In addition, there was a fair amount of sibling rivalry, aided and abetted by their mother, who preferred Jacob over Esau. The rivalry was, of course, about the right of being the firstborn and about the paternal blessing. Jacob has won both by a fair amount of underhand dealing. As a result, Jacob and his mother have decided that it was time for a family visit to Haran, where Laban, Rebecca's brother was living with his family. The result of the trip was that Jacob has married Laban's two daughters, Leah and Rachel. He did not plan to stray from the family custom, but the bigamous marriages were caused by Laban's underhand trick, this time on Jacob.

Although Jacob fled to Haran from his brother's wrath, it was an inevitable trip. Esau, the second son, has married two Hittite girls from Beer Sheba, much to the grief of his parents. In order to appease them, he married also Ishmael's granddaughter, who was family. Rebecca told Isaac that she is aggrieved that Esau has married Hittite girls, and she could not bear that Jacob should do the same. But, in Canaan, there were Canaanites, Hittites and Amalekites. All of them were unacceptable to Rebecca and Isaac, so for Jacob remained only a family visit to Haran and marry there.

There were no more visits back to Haran. The fourth generation, the children of Jacob and Esau, were at home in Canaan and found marriage partners closer to home. The importance of the monogamous marriages has also disappeared, the new generation had new principles.

* * * *

This chapter – Family Affairs – presented a clear picture of a family, which reached a new country and eventually settled down. At the beginning it kept the customs of the old country, even by sending his sons to find brides there, until the fourth generation already felt at home, with new customs and habits. There were no more trips back to Haran.

How long did it take to be assimilated to the new country? Of course a calculation based upon the Book of Genesis cannot form a rule, but still it can be an indication. According to traditional chronology, Abraham reached

Canaan in 2091 BC. Jacob and Esau were born about 2006 BC and married in 1966 BC. Accordingly, the first 125 years the family kept the old customs and family connections. After that there was a process of assimilation and when the children of Jacob went down to Egypt, they were already a Semitic tribe.

There is another aspect that should be evaluated . The tribe of Abraham was not ordinary immigrants, looking for better conditions in a foreign country. In fact, they were conquerors. As far as one can understand from the stories of the Old Testament, the conquest was very partial, meaning that they did not take over the whole country, at least not then, and it was in two waves. The first wave was that of the tribe of Abraham that succeeded to infiltrate Canaan in a peaceful way; probably because it was depopulated as a result of adverse climatic conditions. The second wave was the return of Jacob, with his sons. The case of the rape of Dina, and the revenge for the affront by her brothers, Simon and Levi, was probably the cover story of a violent conquest. Similar to the stories of the Greek mythology, here too the story covers an actual event. It is possibly that the eventual split in the united Monarchy, after the death of Solomon, was a residual effect of the original conquest. The kingdom of Israel, in the central highland, was probably the area of the violent conquest. The kingdom of Judah, was the continuation of the original peaceful infiltration of the tribe of Abraham.

In the story of the Book of Genesis, there is a clear description of how conquest of territories was made in the ancient world by cattle-nomads, using method of peaceful infiltration or violent invasion, and how ethnicity was defined or changed.

The story of conquest by northern cattle-nomads was explained both in general and in specific forms. The general description explained the roots of the permanent conflict between farmers and cattle breeders, and why the farmers could never stop the cattle-nomads, and the specific part described the route of Abraham and Lot, and their tribes, from the north to the south as one single part of the general picture. The divine voice, urging Abraham to leave his ancestral land and go to Canaan, was active all along humane history, urging people to find a better life, greener pastures and obedient serfs to toil for their masters. There is no doubt that Canaan was not an exception. Those of the cattle-nomads, who overran Europe, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Iran, India, China and others, also followed voices and searched for their destinies.

Why did they need excuses for what they did? If they would be judged according to our modern ethical standards, then we would say that they

were aware that they are taking away something from other people and they need some religious justification. However, luckily for them, not one of the cattle-nomad tribes seemed to have anything resembling conscience, so they did not need justification.

If so, then why the divine guidance? The simplest answer is that at that time everything was under divine guidance; there was no other. If the weather, storms, child births, yield of crops and everything else, were controlled by unseen deities, then such an important action as pulling up stakes and invading a country must have been not only divinely approved, but divinely ordered.

The Book of Genesis tells a story of a family, which went through a number of transformations. First, it changed its residence from somewhere in historic Armenia, through the Euxine Lake catastrophe to the valley of the upper Balikh river, on the northern reaches of the Euphrates, and finally to Canaan. Second, it became a clan from a single family, from there to a tribe and finally to a nation. Third, it changed its livelihood because of external causes, from comfortable hunter-gatherer existence to agriculture, from there to husbandry, and back to agriculture again. Last but not least, it underwent a major religious revolution.

The transformation was not solely a change from a family into a nation, and from cattle-nomads into settled people, but also a change of ethnicity. Here, there is a major problem. It is difficult to define with any measure of accuracy the original ethnicity of those people, lacking proper technical terms. Archaeologists can point to an excavation and say that the people who lived there belonged to the Cro-Magnons or to the Ubaid. Then they point to a village on top of the excavations and claim that those who were living there were Celts or Sumerians. So, when did the change occur?

Nobody was able to give a satisfactory answer to that question. Small hunter-gatherer groups were moving around the prehistoric landscape, trying to make a living in a hostile world. Eventually, because of increased demographic pressure or because of increased hostility of the environment, the groups remained in one area instead of moving around as in the good old days. The change gave them common memories, language, customs, religion and finally common enemies. Where were the enemies? In the next valley, of course.

So, when we ask a question about the ethnicity of the family in the Book of Genesis, no definite answer can be given, because the beginning of the story is so far back in time, that there were no Indo-Europeans, Caucasians or

Semitic around. They arrived much later.

The area, where the Book of Genesis pointed out as the original home of the family, was in historic Armenia, which today is in Iranian Azerbaijan. They might have been from any of the peoples milling around there at that time, Indo-Europeans, Caucasians, Ural-Altaians and even Dravidians. Judging from their customs as reflected in the Book of Genesis, they were probably Indo-Europeans. Robert Graves thought them to be Armenians, he called Abraham a "much-traveled Armenian tribe". This book does not put much importance on specific ethnic definitions, so it assumes that they belonged to that part of the family of the speakers of Indo-European languages, who were cut off from the main body of the family by the deluge of the Euxine Lake. But from whatever it was in its origin, eventually it turned into a nation with a northwestern Semitic language, and probable with a suitable ethnic composition.

It must be pointed out that the Book of Genesis does not tell a unique story. In the turn of the third and second millennia BC, the map of the Middle East was full of city-states where the rulers had Indo-European or Hurrian names. There were even more places where the names were a combination of Semitic theophoric and one of the northern languages, Indo-European or Hurrian. There seems to be no doubt that the ethnic composition of the ruling aristocracy corresponded to the names of the rulers.

Despite all that, and despite the fact that Indo-European encroachment continued in classical times, in the form of Greek and Roman colonization, the area today is solidly Semitic. The meaning here is about the Middle East proper, what is called today the Arabic world, from Egypt to Iraq. East of Iraq, between Iran and India, it is solidly Indo-European. West of Egypt, it is Hamitic or Berber. So, if the family whose life and doings were described in the Book of Genesis, were probably Indo-Europeans in origin, just like the other cattle-nomad tribes who left their traces in the archives of clay tablets, they changed into Semites as did all the others. How did it happen and what was the mechanics of the change?

The Book of Genesis gives a clear and definite answer to that question. As it gave demonstration to the question how the cattle-nomads became the dominant power over the farmers; how the transplanted nomads became part of the settled population; it also showed the exact method by which the change of ethnicity occurred. The answer is here in this chapter; it is marriages and children.

Abraham and Sarah came to Canaan, fought their battles and established

themselves as an aristocracy over the people. They did it by the only legitimate way an aristocracy could receive the allegiance of the people; they saved it from foreign invasion of the 4 Eastern Kings. However, when they sought a bride for their son, they had to send a trusted servant back to the old country to fetch a bride from there. The same has happened in the next generation too. The bride, who herself was brought from the old country, refused to see his son to marry at home, and sent him away to find a proper bride. When her second son married two local girls, she objected to the union, despite the fact that the girls were from similar origin to her. Or were they indeed?

The Book of Genesis told that Abraham was a man of substance. He had to separate from his nephew because their herdsmen came into conflict. The land was too tight to contain them. Abraham also could raise 318 armed retainers in his war against the 4 eastern kings. The number of 318 is rather suspicious; that number appears in too many historical reports. It is probably some kind of a mythological code, meaning 'very many'. But even so, with 318 or with many retainers, the problem was there. Abraham and Sarah sent their servant to bring a bride for their son from the old country. Where did the 318 retainers and the herdsmen find their brides. If they had brought their wives with them on the road, then probably there would not have been a need to bring a bride from far away. The camp of Abraham would have been full with young nubile girls of the same stock as Abraham and Isaac, and human nature would have done its usual work. It does not seem likely that Abraham's, and later Rebecca's, objection were based on social origins. They probably saw the girls in the camp as half-breeds, and that was the main cause of the objection.

According the analysis of this book, and many other researches too, Abraham belonged to the Indo-European cattle-nomads, which moved south to settle in Canaan. Other Indo-Europeans, like Abraham, moved to India, overcame the resistance of the natives, the dasyus' and established the caste system that still plagues India. The Sanskrit word for caste is 'varna'. That word has a second meaning, which is 'color'. There are scholars who claim that the dasyus who opposed the Aryans in the invasion were not native Dravidians but descendants of an earlier Aryan invasion. The idea is not so far-fetched, if one compares it to the situation in Canaan.

In the second generation, the same situation returned. Jacob traveled to Haran to find a bride, but what about the rest of the tribe? Even Esau, who was tricked out of his inheritance, had to find local Hittite girls. It was not the same as girls from the old country, but they were Hittites, or so the Old Testament said. Rebecca and Isaac should have been satisfied but they

were not. So what was wrong with the local Hittites? Probably the same as with the retainers and the herdsmen of Abraham. They intermarried with local girls and they became half-breeds or worse. The Old Testament says that they were Hittites; their names say otherwise. The Hittite fathers of Esau's brides were named Beerli and Elon, good Semitic names, but so was the name of Ephron, who sold Abraham the burial plot.

The names are important here, as the same process that occurred with Abraham and his descendants, was identical to others who were in the same situation that he was. They came from the north, probably in the form of a raiding party, without wives at all, or nearly so. They remained and took local wives. As the transmissions of language and social customs is done by the mothers and not by the fathers, in a few short generations the ethnic composition, including religion, language and customs changes entirely. Accordingly, the future of an invasion does not depend on the ratio of the invading force to the total population, but whether the invasion is in a form of a raiding war party, or whether it is the result of a real transmigration of a whole people; warriors, women and children.

The story of Abraham and his sojourn in Canaan belonged to the first category, but then most of the ancient and even the modern colonization belong there. The waves of the Indo-Aryan invasions of India were of that category, so did those in the Middle East too. But it was not only an effect between Indo-Europeans and Easterners. The Danish Vikings turned into French Normandians in a short time, and those became English in turn. The same process must have been at work there. The aristocracy in Denmark may have provided brides to their kin in Normandy and England, but not to the soldiers and sailors. The same way, the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the Franks, Burgundians and Vandals disappeared as ethnic entities in Europe in a short time. So did the Bulgarians, a Turkish tribe, convert into a Slavic people, in language, religion and customs.

The second type of invasion is when the invaders assimilated the host people. It is much rarer than the first type, because a people does not pull up stakes and move with women and children, only if there are very serious environmental conditions to compel it. The attempted invasion of the Cimbri and Teutoni of Italy, which was defeated by Marius, was of that type, so was the invasion of the delta of the Nile by the Lybians and the Peoples of the Sea, which was defeated by Ramses III.

Such an invasion was in modern times that of the Finns into Finland and the Hungarians into Hungary. Both were tribes of Finn-Ugor origin. They were no more than 10 % of the total population. Present mtDNA tests conducted

by Prof. Cavalli-Sforza proved that in those countries 90 % of the people have DNA compositions compatible with European origin and 10 % of Asian origin. Still, both countries are solidly Finn or Hungarian. It means that the 10 % assimilated the 90 % and became the ruling elite. In time, the elite may have changed but the assimilation remained.

The story of the Book of Genesis provides a priceless illustration and proof of these rules, which are the most basic laws of the ethnic composition of nations.

Notes

1. Gordon J. Wenham, op.cit.,p.328
2. Werner Keller, op.cit.,p.68, Howard F. Vos, op.cit.,p.69, Ignatius Hunt,op.cit.,p.54
3. Fustel de Coulanges, op.cit.p.54 quotes Laws of Manu (India), IX.10
4. Idem, ibid, quotes Iraeus, II.10,46
5. Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.,pp.55 – 58; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis, Introduction, Translation and Notes*, The Anchor Bible Vol.I., Doubleday and Company, New York, 1964, p.93 G.W. Anderson, *A History and Religion in Israel*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.17; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1 – 17*, in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1990,p.62 compares the cases with legal practices in Nuzi
6. Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.,p.57
7. Gordon J. Wehnam, op.cit. p.288
8. Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg,*The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, W.W. Norton, New York, 1997, p.13
9. Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.,pp. 58 – 59, Werner Keller, op.cit. p.68 Code of Hammurabi, No. 140-146,171,181; G.W. Anderson, op.cit., p.17
10. George Barton, op.cit. p.390
11. Ancient Near East Texts (2nd ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1955, pp.159-161, Law No.27
12. Idem, pp. 190-191, quoted by Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.p.42; O.R.Gurney,op.cit.,p.50

THE PATRIARCHS



The Cities of the Plain

Chapter 13 of the Book of Genesis reported that Abraham has separated from his nephew. The cause of the separation was that both had herds and herdsmen, and the area around them was too small for their combined herds. The scarcity of resources brought on a strife between their herdsmen. In order to avoid further friction, Abraham proposed that Lot should choose where he wishes to stay, and he, Abraham, will honor Lot's choice.

Lot looked around, and where he was standing, on the heights of Beth-El, he could see the valley of the Jordan and the northern corner of the Dead Sea. The full body of the Dead Sea was obscured by the hills of Ein-Gedi. He has chosen to go down to the valley. Abraham remained on the highlands, and from then on, he moved with his herds in the triangle Beth-El, Beer-Sheba and Gerar. What attracted Lot to the valley of the Jordan, was the scene as he saw from above. The Old Testament says that it was like the Garden of the Lord in the valley of Tabriz, or like the valley of the Nile, a green oasis between two extents of deserts.

So, Lot went down the valley, settled in the town of Sodom, was captured in due course by the raid of the 4 Eastern Kings and rescued by Abraham. Since then, there was no mention of Lot, apart of one final episode, and after that Lot leaves the story completely. Now about the final episode.

In Chapter 19 of the Book of Genesis, three messengers appeared in Abrahams' camp, announcing to him and Sarah, that they would have a son. Abraham and Sarah were already old, and as the chapter said:

".it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women."

Still, the message was accepted and the messenger continued their journey toward Sodom. The Lord, who was among the messengers, informed Abraham that He decided to destroy Sodom and the other Cities of the

Plain for their sins, and now are on their way to warn Lot to leave the place, together with his family. It is really the story of Noah retold again. Abraham attempted to intercede for the condemned towns and received an assurance that if at least 10 righteous people will be found, the cities will be saved.

The rest of the story is well known, There were no 10 righteous people, so the towns were destroyed. Lot tried to warn his sons-in-law, but they did not heed his warning and remained in Sodom, his wife turned back, against instructions and turned into a pillar of salt. At the end, Lot and his daughters remained alone in a cave. Two tribes, Moab and Ammon, future inveterate enemies of Israel, were the outcome of their stay in the cave. Apart of this, there was no more mention of Lot.

Chapter 18 and 19 describe a natural catastrophe that destroyed a number of towns because of their sins. There are a number of questions, which are to be answered:

Where were the Cities of the Plain?

What were the sins of the cities?

Is there any historical base to the story?

The list of the cities is given in Chapter 14, where the story of the 4 eastern kings is told. Accordingly, the cities are:

Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboim and Zoar (also known as Bela).

The cities are named here not in any order. There is another quotation from the Old Testament, Gen. 10:19, where the borders of Canaan are described:

"And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza, as thou goest unto Sodom and Gomorrah, and Admah and Zeboim, even unto Lasha."

After translating it into modern English, it is:

Go south from Sidon through Gerar to Gazah, from there east to Sodom, from there north to Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim until Lasha (which is north of the Hule. From there west to Sidon). The order of the towns from south to north is :

Sodom

Gomorrah

Admah

Zeboim

Zoar (also known as Bela) is south of Sodom, near the southern corner of the Dead Sea. As far as Admah goes, there is no doubt. It does exist today too. There is a bridge between Israel and Jordan, north of Jericho; it is called the bridge of Damiyah, which is an Arabic transliteration of Admah. The location of Zeboim is also known.

In I Samuel, 13:16-18 the story of a war between Saul and the Philistines is told. Saul was in Gibeah in Benjamin and the Philistines in Mishmash. The Philistines sent three companies out of their camp. One of the companies turned to the way of the border that looked to the valley of Zeboim, toward the wilderness. That valley and the road exist today, and so the location of Zeboim is known.

About the locations of Sodom and Gomorrah there are controversies. There are scholars who think that they were located on the eastern side of the Sea. Others claim that there are many reasons to disqualify that choice. First, the Old Testament says that they were cities on the Plain, while the eastern side of the Sea is about 500 feet high. Second, the sites are much too small. The largest is about 10 acres and the smallest is 2 acres. The third and the most important reason is, that the largest of the sites, Bab ed-Dra, which was just 10 acres, has a cemetery with about 20,000 graves, which holds over 500,000 bodies. It is possible that Bab ed-Dra served as a cemetery for all the towns in the area, mainly those of the southern part of the Sea, Sodom, Gomorrah and Zoar.

It is possible that the missing towns are covered by the southern part of the Dead Sea, which is much shallower than the northern part. Searching for the Cities of the Plain is second only to the search for Noah's Ark, on and around Mount Ararat and the Ark of the Covenant, from Jerusalem to Ethiopia. Only recently it was reported that the remains of the two towns, Sodom and Gomorrah, were located on the northern, deeper part of the Sea.^{[1](#)} There is an evidence, much earlier than the article. That evidence was given by Josephus Flavius, who wrote that in his time, the traces of the towns were still to be seen. The Roman historian, Tacitus, probably copied it from Josephus Flavius.^{[2](#)}

There is contemporary evidence to the existence of the cities, and of their importance. It is in the archives of Ebla. It is true that a translation of a tablet that reported the existence of the cities, in the same order as in the Bible, was reported in 1976, but it is also true that the original report was

later withdrawn.

Without going into the political difficulties of the claims and counterclaims about the archives of Ebla, it would be very curious if a commercial center, like Ebla, would not record the producers of probably the most important product of their time, which was bitumen.

This brings the quest to the case of the sins of the cities. The Bible talks about sexual depravities, which might have been the truth, but not the whole truth. There is a verse of the Prophet Ezekiel that describes the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. (16, 49-50):

"Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughter, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty and committed abominations before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good."

The sins become a bit clearer. They might have been haughty and committed abominations, but first they had pride and fullness of bread; they were idle and rich. In one of the tablets of Ebla, luckily uncensored by the Syrian government, there is a list of purchases and the price of each item in silver. The most expensive item on the list was bitumen. Bitumen was the most common product of the Dead Sea at that time. When telling the story of the war with the alliance of 4 eastern kings, it was told that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah have fallen into the 'slime pits' – the pits where the bitumen was mined.

Bitumen in nature results when an underground petroleum reserve oozes to the surface. It exists only where there are petroleum reserves and suitable geological conditions. In the modern world it is very common. Each petroleum refinery produces more bitumen than can be sold, therefore it is cheap. In the old world, it was very rare, therefore very expensive. They used it to cover their clay bricks, and generally for waterproofing. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were sitting next door to an open goldmine. Indeed, without that goldmine, it is doubtful that anybody would sit in that unfriendly part of the world. It is no wonder that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah had 'pride and fullness of bread.' Moreover, they had plenty of idle time to commit 'abominations'.

Their wealth did not make them popular. Already in Chapter 14, the king of Sodom was described in an unfriendly way, demanding the prisoners and

willing to renounce the booty to Abraham. This gesture was mentioned in the Old Testament to emphasize their wealth. So the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were basically that of idle wealth and all that ensuing from it.

There is no way of knowing about the time of the catastrophe, or even if it happened at all. The complex of the Dead Sea goes back millions of years, when the Syrian-African rift was created, that rift which starts in the valley of the Hule in the north of Israel, and ends in the Lake of Malawi. It certainly was not created at the time of the Patriarchs.

If one accepts the story of the Old Testament, then either Lot must have been an extremely illogical person, or that he changed profession from husbandry to trade in bitumen. He decided to descend to the valley of the Jordan, because he saw the greenery around the river, and decided that he will have plenty of pasture and water for his cattle. His decision was certainly correct. But, then he descended to the valley and ended up at Sodom, which is probably the most unfriendly piece of real-estate on this earth, then and now. Its average rainfall is around 15 millimeters a year. So, either he left his herds around Admah and Zeboim, and settled in Sodom, or he changed profession.

There is no overwhelming direct evidence for a catastrophe in that area at the time of the Patriarchs, but there is plenty of indirect evidence. There are signs of breaks of civilizations in that area around 2000 BC. In Bab ed-Dra, which was probably the central cemetery of the area, and in Transjordan in general there are clear signs for such a break.³ Still, one cannot pinpoint the break in civilizations to a specific catastrophe.

There is a new evidence which is worth while to investigate. It does not point directly to the area of the five cities but to other area with similar geological conditions. The book⁴ describes the destruction of a Mesopotamian city, named Mashkan-Sapir, and attempts to connect it with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. However, there is a considerable distance between the two; one is in the valley of the Dead Sea, and the second is hundreds of miles east, on the border of Iraq and Kuwait, sitting atop a large oilfield, which was one of the causes of Gulf war of 1991. The conditions and the period of the destruction did certainly fit the description of the Book of Genesis.

The excavations proved that the city was destroyed by a firestorm, which was caused by mixing salt, free sulphur and oil, the ingredients of incendiary bombs. The mixture was probably lit by lightning. The

combustion of such a mixture can continue until there is pressure on the petroleum to continue flowing upwards to feed the combustion. The length and intensity of the fire depend on the quantities of the oil underneath the combustion.

The quantities of Mashkan-Sapir were much greater, it is one of the largest oilfield on earth, so the town was completely burnt out. The conditions of the Dead Sea were similar, but the quantities of the oil were much smaller, so the whole region today is a burnt-out area of oil and asphalt.⁵

Judging from the nearness of the two sites, the probable period of the destruction and the fact that both sites were on the fault line of the joint of the plate of the Arab Peninsula and the main tectonic plate of Western Asia, it is entirely possible that there was indeed a single catastrophe, which started with an earthquake along the fault line. The earthquake mixed the ingredients of the firebombs, where there were ingredients. Large quantity at Mashkan-Sapir and less at Sodom. Finally, there might have been some electrical storm, usually following earthquakes, which lit the fuse. It is possible that there were other catastrophes along the same fault line, but between the Dead Sea and Mashkan-Sapir there was only empty desert, as it is so today too, so no possible witnesses and artificial residues.

Such a catastrophe was eminently possible and realistic. The wealth of the area was in the slime-pits, where they extracted the bitumen, and that wealth has caused their undoing. The Book of Genesis wrote that Abraham got up early in the morning, looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and saw smoke going up as the smoke from a furnace. He could see the smoke but from where he was standing he could not see that other signs of the catastrophe, the brimstones. They are burnt out pieces of pure sulphur, which are strewn all over the landscape, even today. They are not only in the valley of the Dead Sea, but also in the valley of the Jordan, towards Admah and Zeboim. The center of the catastrophe must have been where the slime-pits were, where the petroleum reserves oozed to the surface, but the following blow-up was strong enough to cover the whole area too.⁶

So, what is the answer to the historicity to the destruction of the Cities of the Plain. Thanks to the excavations of Mashkan-Sapir, the answer is emphatically yes for the historicity. Two identical catastrophes, based on similar geological conditions, with similar outcomes, are too rare to be coincidental. So, either the story of one is the retelling of the second, which is always a possibility, or there were indeed two catastrophes, which probably were two sites of the same catastrophe. Luckily, the remains of

Mashkan-Sapir are covered with sand, so they could be excavated. The remains of Sodom and Gomorrah are covered by brine with 30 % salt contents. So, the search is still continuing, but the local conditions are not very friendly to the archaeologists. Still, there are sufficient evidences in the valley of the Dead Sea in the form of occasional blobs of asphalt floating in the brine, and in the form of burnt out brimstones. These evidences help to decide that the story of the Old Testament is the description of a real catastrophe and not a second-hand retelling of the catastrophe of Mashkan-Sapir.

Notes

1. Jonathan Petre, *Sodom and Gomorrah are found at bottom of Dead Sea*, Daily Telegraph, London, Issue 1755, 26 March 2000
2. Josephus Flavius, *Wars of the Jews*, IV. 4 – 8; Tacitus, *History* V.7
3. Joseph P. Free, op.cit. p.56, Merrill F. Unger, op.cit. pp. 114 – 117, W.G. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, op.cit. pp.133ff
4. Charles Pellegrino, *Return to Sodom and Gomorrah*, Avon Books, New York, 1994, pp.139-182.
5. Merrill F. Unger, op.cit. p.115
6. Dr. Melvin Kyle, *Explorations at Sodom*, New York, 1928, pp.52 - 53

THE PATRIARCHS



The Case of the Teraphim

The chapter of Family Affairs showed in what way a group of people can change its ethnicity, if reaching a situation which causes such a change.

The statement above relates to the practice of marriages and education of children of the family of the Patriarchs, and to most of other groups of people who reached foreign countries, either as conquerors or humble immigrants, without wives and children and became assimilated to the conquered or the host people in a few short generations. There were a number of examples which illustrated the thesis: the Vikings in Normandie, the Normans in England, the Bulgars on the Balkans, etc.

This chapter modifies the general law as it was developed in the Family Affairs. It was stated that since education of children is usually the task of the mothers, and the mothers are from the conquered or the host people, the children will speak the language of the mothers and will probably follow the religion of the mother too. That general law needs a modification and that modification is going to be explained in detail in this chapter. The modification states that despite the elementary education of language, religion and other social subjects, which are transmitted by the mothers and which can change the ethnic belonging in a few short generation, there will always be social elements transmitted by the fathers, and those elements will probably remain active long after the ethnic conversion is completed.

It is sufficient to bring one example. Bulgarians are accepted as a Slavic people; their language is Slavic and their religion is Greek Orthodox. They feel affinity to other Slavic peoples, and their connection to the big brother of all Slavic people, the Russians, is well known. They liberated them from the Turks and they are thankful for it. Still, it is well known that the Bulgarians came to the Balkans in the Middle Ages as a raiding Turkish war party. The descendants of the people from whom the marauding band of Bulgarians separated themselves are still living in European Russia, in

Bashkiria. The Bulgarians who reached the Balkans, became Slavs the same way as the Patriarchs became Semitic.

When another Turkish tribe, the Ottomans, reached the Balkans, the Bulgarians saw in them oppressors and jealously kept their Slavic identity. The enmity to the Turks remained even after receiving independence. In the second half of the twentieth century, they expelled most of those Bulgars who during the occupation became Turks, in name and in religion.

Despite all that, there are common lines between them and the Turks that go back to their common origin. The Turks are known as experts in the sport of wrestling and weight lifting. The Bulgars, alone among the Slavic peoples, are also experts in the same sports. It is an obvious common element, after 1400 years of separate existence. There might be others too. The explanation is obvious. Sports of wrestling and weightlifting is something fathers teach their sons, so they remained untouched.

The subject of this chapter is about the teraphim; an object that was extremely important in the environment where the Patriarchs originated, but unknown among the Semites to whom the Patriarchs have devolved. Despite that, there are signs that the subject of the teraphim became active among the descendants of the Patriarchs, at least among a part of them.

The story started with the return of Jacob and his family to Canaan, from Padan-Aram where he was in service to Laban. When he loaded his camels with his family and goods, it happened that:

"...and Laban went to shear his sheep; and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's". (Gen.31.19).

When Laban returned and found that Jacob has fled, taking with him his images, he decided to pursue them. When he found them, he searched for the images in their tents, saying to Jacob: "Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods? (Gen. 31.30),

However, Rachel has hidden them among the saddles of the camels and sat on them. When Laban came to her tent to search for the images, Rachel said:

"Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images."

Finally, not having found the images, Laban has built a pillar on a heap of

stones, on which they both declared that the pillar will be a border between them and neither of them will cross it. At the end, Laban added that:v

"The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us." (Gen.31:53)

This is the story of the images, what is called the 'teraphim'. What exactly were those 'teraphim' and what was their importance so that Laban had to pursue Jacob for three days, and Rachel saw them important enough to steal and hide them.

There are a number of possible explanations. One of the explanations is that of Cassuto, who wrote commentaries to the Old Testament. According to his commentary the 'teraphim' were household idols, also used as oracular statues. Rachel has stolen them because she wanted to prevent her father to follow false gods. This explanation is not realistic. Rachel has grown up with those household gods; it is doubtful that she saw in them false gods. In the same line of thought, it would be more realistic to claim that she stole them because she did not want to part with them.

There is a second explanation, which is more pragmatic. According to a judgment found among the tablets of Nuzi, the possession of the household gods, the 'teraphim', implied leadership of the family, and in the case of a married daughter assured the right of her husband to the property of her father. It is possible that Laban was thinking along the same lines. That was the reason why he built the pillar and let Jacob swear that he will not cross that pillar again. He assumed that the images were somewhere in Jacob's camp and eventually they will be used to claim the property of the family. It is doubtful that Jacob would agree to do so. Laban had sons and they were with their father. Jacob had one set of enemies at home, Esau and his sons, and it is doubtful that he was keen on having another set of enemies. But Jacob was not involved in Rachel's secret, and when he learned about it, he was quick to get rid of them.

There is another explanation, but before examining why Rachel has taken the 'teraphim', the meaning of that expression should be examined. It is obvious that to Laban they were extremely important; otherwise the haste by which he chased after Jacob cannot be understood. Moreover, he called the 'teraphim' – my gods'.

In the chapter of Family Affairs, it was shown that the Indo-Europeans in general had a religion of worship of ancestors. Fustel de Coulanges wrote:

"This religion of the dead appears to be the oldest that has existed among this race of men. Before men had any notion of Indra or Zeus, they adored the dead; they feared them and addressed them prayers. It seems that the religious sentiment commenced on this way. It was perhaps by looking upon the dead that man first conceived the idea of the supernatural, and began to have a hope beyond what he saw. Death was the first mystery and it placed man on the track of other mysteries."¹

The worship of the dead was, therefore, the first and primary religion, especially of those from the Indo-Europeans. According to this belief, the dead remained part of the family, physically existing in their graves. The living members of the family had to worship them and supply their needs; even when those needs were symbolic. That was the reason why Abraham wanted to adopt a son when losing hope that he will ever have a son from his marriage. Continuation of the family was a religious duty, only a son who was born of a sacred marriage or adopted with all necessary rites, could be the inheritor. That was the reason why marriages with Indo-Europeans were sacred and could not be sundered, except in the case of the wife being barren. That was also the reason why in some Greek cities to remain single was a criminal offence, punishable by the polis.

The worship of the dead was a family religion, meaning that only members of the family could participate in the rites. Each family had its own rites and prayers, and only the members of the family knew them. No one could belong to two religions, wives had to leave their own religion and be accepted into the religion of the husband. The custom of carrying the wife through the threshold in the arms of the husband symbolizes that the wife was forcibly taken from one family to another so the family gods of her previous family should not harm her because of her infidelity.

Their common belief was that the dead had to be buried near the living members of the family; they sometimes went to extraordinary lengths to ensure a proper burial. During the Peloponnesian war, there was a naval battle between the Athenians and the Spartans near the Asiatic shore. The Athenians won the battle but because of stormy weather the commanders of the Athenian navy did not collect the dead Athenians from the water. The commanders were put on trial as Athenian citizens could not receive proper burials because of their negligence. They were found guilty and executed because of impious behavior. That was the time when the Parthenon and the temples of the Olympian gods were built, and Socrates and Plato were developing the principles of rational thinking. The old religion was still stronger.

It was so not only then; it is so even today, without most of the people knowing the reasons. Thirty years after the Vietnam War, Americans are still searching for those missing in action, in order to bring them to proper burial. Furthermore, each country belonging to western civilization, has at least one public monument, 'The Grave of the Unknown Soldier' which is the substitute of modern society for the old religious law. These monuments are also accompanied with an 'eternal fire' which is another of the symbols of the old religion, the family hearth. The duty of maintaining the eternal fire was performed in Rome by the Vestal Virgins. The same task is performed now by mechanical means, but the principles are the same.

The Greek called the human souls, deified by death, demons or heroes. The Latins gave them the name of Lares, Manes or genii. The graves were temples, where sacrifices were made, just like before the temples of the gods.² The differences between the two were that the rites and prayers of the cult of the dead, were individual to each family, and only members of the family could participate in them. In Rome each grave had the inscription: Dis Manibus – (dedicated) to the gods Manes.

There is no way of knowing what were the names of the dead spirits among those peoples the patriarchs came from. It might have been 'teraphim' or something else. It is possible that the expression 'teraphim' was the name of the physical appearance of the dead ancestors, just as in Italy and Greece the concept of the dead ancestors, and their physical representation was identical.

It should be noted that despite the use of the word 'teraphim' in the Bible, it is not a Hebrew word. It was definitely borrowed from an Indo-European language. The Hebrew commentators to the Bible explain the meaning of the word as 'idols' and according to Jewish principles it certainly was so. The English cognate of the word 'teraphim' is 'trophy'. The present meaning of the word 'trophy' is something that one receives by winning a competition, so there are trophies for sport competitions, and there are trophies for hunting and fishing. A copper cup one receives for winning a bridge tournament is a 'trophy' and so is the head of a deer, prepared by a taxidermist, hanging over a mantelpiece. In the sense of the second example, a scalp taken by an Indian from his slain enemy was a trophy and so was the head taken in a fight by a Sarmatian or Scythian warrior. Herodotus reported that Sarmatian warriors fashioned a drinking cup out their enemies' skull. So, it was a common practice among the original Indo-European tribes.

It seems that this was the origin of the word from which the 'teraphim'

of the Bible was taken. The original Indo-Europeans worshiped their ancestors and the 'teraphim' were their earthy remains. In this respect the Egyptian mummies were also 'teraphim' and the Indo-European teraphim were probably similar to the Egyptian mummies, at least in principle. It is possible that in later, more civilized ages, the teraphim were deadmasks of the ancestors. This is the impression one gets from reading the Latin classics. In earlier ages, the teraphim were probably the mummified heads of the ancestors. The original Indo-European tribes lacked the knowledge to mummify the whole body, but probably had the experience to mummify the heads. Even if they could mummify the whole body, it would not have been a practical proposition for pastoral people, forever on the move. Judging from later commentators, it seems that the meaning of 'teraphim' mentioned in the Bible is the original type: mummified heads of the late ancestors.

If the teraphim were identical to the Greek demons and the Latin manes, then there are a number of questions that must be posed. In what way were the teraphim unique, what were they in the context of Laban and Jacob, and what was their size?

Laban has pursued Jacob and his family, looking for the stolen teraphim. He met up with them and accosted Jacob with a question:

"Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?"

And Jacob has answered that he has not done so, but if he finds that someone from his camp did it, then:

"With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live." (Gen. 31:32)

These are strong words, and they prove a number of points:



There were more than one of the teraphim stolen by Rachel. In the chapter there are always references to gods and not to god.



Jacob recognized the values of the teraphim, otherwise he would not offer a penalty of death, if Laban could prove that someone from his camp stole them.



The teraphim were irreplaceable. If they would have been ordinary idols, then Laban could have gone to the nearest shop and replace them. In modern Catholic homes there are small statues of Jesus, or Mary, or the Saints. Nobody would assign those statues more than possible sentimental value.



There is another meaningful paragraph in this chapter. When Laban saw that he could not find the teraphim, he set up a pillar on a heap of stones and he swore an oath, and made Jacob swear it too. The wording of the oath is very curious:

"The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us."

This sentence can be understood that there were three gods involved here; the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of Terach, who was the father of both of them. This is also the understanding of Cassuto, the commentator of the Old Testament.

Abraham and Nahor, both were Terach's sons. Laban was the grandson of Terach, and Jacob his great-grandson. According to our understanding they were one family. It was not so according to theirs, as the previous sentence had so eloquently proven.

Abraham had left the family, and chosen a new country and a new God. By moving away from the family, he had chosen a new religion. If the story is put into a proper, contemporary frame, then Abraham has left his ancestors back in Haran, while Nahor, Laban and their family kept the family hearth burning and worshiped the family ancestors. It is doubtful that Laban saw in the stealing of the teraphim an attempt to inherit the family property, but an attempt to acquire legitimacy to that branch of the family that left the old homestead and moved to Canaan.

The teraphim that Laban kept and wanted to return were probably the death masks, or the mummified heads, of Nahor, Terach and probably previous generations too. If one looks at the generations from the point of view of the religion of the worship of ancestors, then the huge lifetimes, both in the Book of the Genesis, and in the Sumerian List of Kings, receive a different meaning.

What Rachel wanted to achieve and Laban wanted to prevent, was not a question of property, but a wish to establish the legitimacy of the family in Canaan. This also explains Jacob's reaction when he found out that the teraphim were all along in his camp. He buried them under an oak in Schechem³, set up an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. He realized that the old religion cannot give answers to splits in the family, as happened among the children of Terach, and undoubtedly in many more families like the Patriarchs, and the worship of the ancestors should be replaced by something which is more general, and wider than the scope of a single

family.

The teraphim were, therefore, the effigies of the ancestors. It was so in India, Greece and Italy, and probably everywhere the Indo-Europeans established their rule, and their religious and social customs. They were thought to be the effigies of the ancestors, who were in a form of semi-existence, kept alive by caring for their tombs and worshiping them with prayers. A family, which remained without a male heir, was destined to die out in the future, and wiped out in the past too.

It is difficult to realize in our cynical age, but even in classical times, when the old religion remained mainly the prerogative of old aristocratic families, that the rites concerning the effigies were very much alive. When Julius Caesar made his triumph in Rome after the victory in Gallia, his family has joined his triumphal march, as it was customary. He led the march, standing in his chariot, with a slave holding the laurel crown over his head and whispering in his ears, that he shouldn't forget that despite everything, he remained mortal. The chariots of his family followed him, both the living part of the family and the effigies of his ancestors. Caesar was an aristocrat, the bluest of the blue, so his ancestors went back a very long time, even back to Venus. It was reported that there were dozens of carriages for the 'teraphim' of his family.

This example puts a new light on the case of Rachel and the teraphim. If Laban was indeed the keeper of the effigies of the ancestors, then he must have had a long list of teraphim, probably from Noach, or even earlier. So many teraphim raise immediately the question of their size, as it would be impossible to hide so many man-size effigies among the saddles of the camels.

In Greece, Roman and India, and probably in the whole Indo-European world at that time, the effigies were probably life-size or at least the sizes of a human head, as they were death masks⁴ made immediately after the death. This was what made them unique. One can make or buy a new idol but one cannot make a new death mask if the original was stolen or lost.

There are different views about the size of the teraphim. Some accepted the classical Roman scholars who opted for life-sized statues with death masks for faces, like the mask of Agamemnon from Mycaenae. Others thought differently. Robert Graves⁵ quoted Elias Levita, a 15th century Hebrew commentator, who recorded a tradition that the teraphim, which Rachel stole from Laban, were mummified oracle heads of the ancestors and the

head of Adam amongst them. Judging from the English cognate of the word, 'trophy', it seems that Levita's comments were correct.

There is a chapter in the Old Testament from which one can learn about the size of the teraphim. The chapter tells about the first conflict between Saul and David, when Saul sent assassins to murder David. Michal had the ingenuity to hide David and spirit him away from the palace. The Old Testament told the story how Michal succeeded of doing it:

"...Michal took an image, and laid it on the bed, and put a pillow of goat's hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said: He is sick." (I Samuel,19:13-14)

One can understand from this sentence that the head of the teraphim was life-size, which fits with the theory that they were dead masks, or mummified heads, while the size of the body was bolstered by a pillow. Bolstering means enhancing or increasing, but not replacing. So the head was life-size but the body was smaller. It is a possibility, after all the important part was the effigy itself. It is also possible that there were different developments among those who directly continued the tradition, like the Indians, Greeks and Latins , and others who practiced the tradition, without really understanding its meaning. Between the period of the Patriarchs, and Saul and David, there was at least one millennium. During that time they became completely Semites, while keeping a number of traditions without knowing their origins.

The first mention of the teraphim in the Old Testament is in the story of Rachael and Laban. The last mention, chronologically, is that of the prophet Hosea, who named them as articles of false worship:

"...the children of Israel will abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod and without teraphim." (Hosea 3:4)

False or not, in the time of Hosea, in the 8th century BC, 1200 years after Jacob buried them in Schechem, the teraphim were well known in Israel. It is assumed that Hosea used examples, which he was certain that his listeners would understand. So were they in the period of Saul and David. Michal did not have to search for something to put on the bed to fool would-be assassins; she took one of the teraphim. It was also common at the time of the Judges⁶ when one from the tribe of Dan decided to build a temple, putting in it ephods and teraphim. After the destruction of Samaria and

Jerusalem they are not heard from any more. Still, it was about 1500 years that the subject of teraphim occasionally surfaced in the writings.

The story of the teraphim, as it was told here, is one more example of the route the cattle-nomad tribes were taking, in their progress from a nomadic pastoral existence to expansion and eventual settled life, as lords of the manor over agricultural serfs. Until, they lived in their old surroundings, they could keep their traditions. Even, after their transplantation to settled existence, there might have been special cases and special periods, which allowed them to keep the old customs, but eventually there were objective factors, mainly of demographic nature, which brought the inevitable change.

Even in special places, where the invading cattle-nomads assimilated the existing population, like in Rome or Sparta, the old religion had to be replaced. There was a long fight over it, in Rome between Patricians and Plebeians, and in Sparta between citizens and helots, but eventually demography was victorious. The old religion of the dead ancestors, with its center in the families, with the family hearth and the faith that the dead ancestors are physically present in their effigies, carrying the dead masks or the mummified heads of the deceased, could not overcome the demographic explosion. The old religion had to change and change it did. Cremation replaced burial, and central permanent fire, carefully maintained by special bodies, like the Vestal Virgins, replaced the family hearth.

There are a number of vestigial appearances that remained from the old religion. The grave of the Unknown Soldier, which is a permanent fixture in every western country, with its eternal flame, is one of the vestiges. So is the All-Saint day, when the cemeteries are full of visitors and uncounted candles are burning as burial offerings. There is also a never ceasing effort to bring the dead to a proper burial. People may not identify their wish to bring their loved ones to proper burial with the case of the Athenian citizens who tried their admirals for leaving the casualties of the naval battle in the sea, but both have identical roots.

The endless military cemeteries and the monuments recording the names of those who died for the community in special circumstances, are all round western Civilization. From the Black Wall in Washington with the names of those killed in the Vietnam War to the Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem, with the names of those killed in the Holocaust.

This chapter showed the mechanism of a very interesting historical process. An extended family, or a clan, has split from his tribe and wandered to find

a new home. They were not alone. At about the same time, there might have been thousands of similar clans, doing a similar journey. This particular clan traveled from the upper reaches of the Euphrates to Canaan; others might have moved from Southern Russia to Armenia and Iran; yet others west to Europe, or east to India, or even to China. These wandering clans had to cope with similar problems provided of course that they succeeded in their task. There is no doubt that there were many who failed. Abraham came to Canaan, accompanied by Lot, but Lot seems to have failed. He has disappeared from history.

We look upon those times and wanderings as a long period of turbulence, when whole peoples invaded territories and established their rule over the serfs as an invasion of organized entities. When we think about the invasion of India by the Indo-Aryans we see an organized people destroying their enemies and changing the color on the map of India. It seems that the process was much more like it was described in the Book of Genesis. Single clans or even tribes detached themselves from that cauldron of people somewhere in southern Russia – central Asia, and set out to some direction from where there was news that the land was ready for the taking. That was the method of the Vikings, who after all were the last wave of the Indo-European flood that probably started much before Abraham. There was a never-ending flow of people, always with different names, but with identical religion and customs. The names were unimportant; they might have been called Scythians, Celts, Italian, Greeks, Tocharians, Phrygians and Illyrians, or any other names. It made no difference.

The result of the process of expansion was usually the same; if the warbands had women and children with them, the conquered people assimilated to them. If they came alone, only with retainers and herdsman, as Abraham did, then they were assimilated to the host people. Thus, Abraham and all other clans, who came after him, became assimilated to the Semites. In the middle of the 2nd millennium BC most of the rulers of the city-states of Syria and the Levant had Indo-European sounding names, and all became Semites in due course. Maybe in the future it will be possible to make general DNA tests and establish the possible ethnic mixture, but even then it will impossible to measure cultural mixture. One can only examine the customs and habits, and attempt to establish their roots.

The story of the teraphim showed that the Patriarchs probably originated from a people in whose culture there was a religion of ancestor worship. Judging from occasional outcropping of the same worship in the Jewish people from the period of the Patriarchs until the destruction of the archaic

form of Judaism, e.g. until the destruction of the first Temple and the exile of the people, the ancestor worship was solidly rooted, if not in the official religion, but certainly in the cultural and social spheres.

Judging from the present practices, it can be said that the residual customs, whose origins are in the old religion of ancestor worship, are most stronger among the Jews than they are among the Europeans, or other peoples of Indo-European origin. Of course, they are much different in these respects from the people of the Middle East, with a possible exception of the Iranians, who despite being Muslims have many cultural traits common with the Europeans.

The Jews are much stricter in their customs with regard to the dead than the Europeans. They share the same habit of days of remembrances, the same eternal fire, and the search for missing persons, but in certain subjects they saved the old customs much more than the Europeans and their descendants around the world, kept theirs. Europeans and Indians cremate their dead, it would be unthinkable for Jews. The resting-place of the dead has such a sanctity that it is not rare to hear stories of redirected highways because ancient graves were discovered during the building. All these are residual memories of an ancient religion, jealously kept by modern Israelis.

One can put a valid question. The Jews lived in Europe for the last 2000 years. They could have learned the customs from their host people during those 2000 years, so what puts them aside from their neighbors was learnt during those 2000 years and not before. It is a valid question, and it has valid answers too.

First, the sanctity of graves and the special mourning procedures that the Jews follow now, were the same two millennia ago too. So, there is a mourning period of seven days, then a special day of remembrance after thirty days and finally a day of remembrance every year, with special prayers and lighting of votive candles. And shades of the old religion, the special prayer for the dead can only be said by a direct male descendants.

Second, there are Jews who never lived in Europe, but in the Middle East, North Africa and even in Africa. The funeral customs, which are vestigial remains of the ancestral religion, are identical for all of them.

There is no wonder that Jews kept the ancient customs more than the Indo-Europeans. People who were independents, as the Indo-Europeans were, had to adapt themselves to changing conditions. People, who lived in the last two millennia as a barely tolerated minority, could keep its identity

only by jealously guarding their customs.

Notes

1. Fustel de Coulanges, op.cit., pp.24 – 25
2. Virgil, Aeneas IV.34; Aulus Gellius, X. 18, Suetonius , Nero 50
Euripides, Troades 96, Electra, 513
3. Merrill F, Unger, op.cit., p.127
4. Charles Pellegrino, op.cit., p.297 shows the famous death mask of Agamemnon
5. Robert Graves, The White Goddess, op.cit.,p.164
6. Judges 17 – 18, the story of the Danites and their temple with graven images and teraphim

THE PATRIARCHS



Religious Interlude

It was explained in the introduction to this book that although the subject is religious; the treatment is historical. The Patriarchs, the heroes of the book, are venerated by the monotheistic religions, as their forerunners and ancestors. So, the subject is eminently religious. It is intimately interwoven with profound theological questions.

However, even religious subjects have historical frames and there are always interrelations between them. One cannot understand the theological contents of the 95 theses nailed by Martin Luther on the door of the Cathedral of Wittenberg without understanding the stresses between the German and the Latin worlds at that time. Similarly, one cannot really understand the theology of St. Francis of Loyola, without putting it within the frame of the Counterreformation of Europe of the 16th – 17th century. The same with Abraham and the Patriarchs. They brought a new theological message, which is accepted today by about half of humanity. But Abraham did not emerge from a vacuum. He came from somewhere, he was brought up on certain concepts. Moreover, he has wandered around and he must have been impressed by certain things he saw, and repelled by others. All those impressions might or might not be part of his message, and this is exactly what this chapter intends to find out.

As far as the treatment of religious subjects is concerned, the original warning on that subject should be sounded again. The first book of the Old Testament is the story of the Patriarchs. In the modern world, there are a number of views about that book.

There are some who are believers. They accept that the book contains God's truth and there is no need for explanations, commentaries or additions. One has to accept it, as it is. This book is not for them.

Then there are the unbelievers. Some of them see in the stories of the Old Testament pure mythology and they too have no need to relate the stories to a historical frame. They are the exact counterpart of the believers. One reads the story about the 'burning bush' and sees in it a sign of divine presence. The second reads the same story, and sees in it a physical impossibility, therefore it is pure mythology.

The third type of people are those who read the Bible because of its theological, philosophical, ethical, and historical contents. They might not be religious or agnostic either. They do seek an explanation to the myths of the Bible. This book was written for those people. If there is a need to paste a label, then it is a kind of secular commentary. It does not involve theological excursions and theoforic explanations, but it makes an honest effort to fit the story within a realistic historical framework. The book does not intend to explain the theological message of the Patriarchs; it only looks at the stories from a different angle.

So far as it can be understood, the family of Abraham may have originated north of the line which divided, and still divides, the world of the Semites and that of the non-Semites. The actual ethnic origin is unknown. The family lived east of the river Euphrates, in the valley of the river Balikh, one of the major tributary of the Euphrates. The period when the Patriarchs emerged was sometime between the last quarter of the 3rd millenium BC and the first quarter of the 2nd millenium BC. At that time and in that area, the Patriarchs could have been Indo-Europeans or Hurrians. Those two peoples lived in a curious form of symbiosis; they even expanded in a cooperative way. Although Canaan was a country with a strong Hittite connection, the Hurrian element was equally strong. There were major towns in Canaan, like Jerusalem or Schechem, which were led by Jebusites or Hivites, both tribes of Hurrian origin.

However, there were a number of outward signs that Abraham came from a tribe with Indo-European background. In the history of the Patriarchs there are a number of signs pointing to Indo-European customs. The matter of the veneration of the ancestors that seemed to be an important part of their religion, was certainly better known by the Indo-Europeans than by the Hurrians. The importance of the religious part of the story of the Patriarchs is in the fact that the family left their homeland and the graves of its ancestors, which was the most important point of their religious affiliation. They wandered to a new country, where they had to put down roots, socially, economically, and what is most important, they had to create a new religious framework to replace the old one which could not be carried to a

new country.

One can look at the history of the ancient east, or to the history of the ancient world, and see that their whole life was centered on religion. It was a period without answers of any kind, apart from those given by religions. Sometimes, it was difficult to define the main subjects of the religions. The Hurrians had a Pantheon of more than seventy deities, covering every conceivable human activity; the latter classical religions, especially the Latins, had even more. But, if some definition is needed, then the main subject was the mystery; which was gift to humans from the tree of knowledge, the road between birth and death, and beyond. Eventually, the preoccupation with birth and death, was extended to the birth and death of all living things; to fertility and renewal, which was the basis of all fertility rites.

Thus, every people had a certain preoccupation with birth and death. The ancient Egyptians even centered their whole existence on the mystery of Isis, Osiris and Horus, which was really about the mystery of birth and death.. But practically every people in the ancient world had the same deities and rites, under different names. It would be too much to claim that the religions were interchangeable, but someone who worshiped Ishtar in Babylon, could continue to worship the same goddess under the name of Astarte in Canaan, or Aphrodite in Greece, or even Easter in Europe. The same with the male gods; they all were the consorts of the goddess under different names. There was a notable exception to this.

The Indo-Europeans had a religion that was basically different from those in the ancient East. They also had their fertility rites, after all they were pastoral nomads who had to rely on the favor of the gods for the fertility of their herds, but their real religion was connected with the human mystery of birth and death, and that in an extreme intimate manner.

The original religion of the Indo-Europeans was the worship of the ancestors. Each family had its own religion, with its rites and prayers. The acts of prayers were restricted to the members of the family; even close friends were not allowed to participate in them. The center of the family religion was the 'family hearth' with its fire that had to be alive at all times. The permanent fire had to be taken care as long as the family was alive; It went out when nobody was left to take care of it. It seems that the family of the Patriarchs either belonged to one of the Indo-European tribes, or to some other people, like the Hurrians, who were influenced by the Indo-Europeans. Judging from many signs, not the least by the probable place of the Garden of Eden, which was in historic Armenia, they were

probable Armenians; this was at least the opinion of Robert Graves.

The story of the Genesis, especially that part where it tells about Jacob, Rachel and Laban's teraphim, which were taken by Rachel, opens a whole new vista about the religious circumstances the Patriarchs were in. It is not only the story of the 'teraphim' but also the words of Laban, when he was talking about the 'God of Abraham' and the 'God of Nahor'. This sentence definitely points to the religious concept of the Indo-Europeans. Isis was the same goddess in Egypt, as Cybele was in Phrygia. Both were goddesses of vegetation, and both had a consort who was killed by a boar. However, the concept of the Indo-Europeans said that the God of Abraham was only the God of Abraham and his descendants, and the God of Nahor was the God of Nahor and his descendants. This concept was neither used by the Hurrians or by the Semites. Only the Indo-Europeans had the concept of a personal god; the others had concepts of gods of natural forces¹ or of human occupations.

It seems that the religions of the ancestors originated in deep prehistoric times, when the family was huddling together in a cave, and were worshipping the same gods, which were the ancestors. That type of religion must have been suitable for times when they had a low fertility rate, or when their number was more or less static. In those conditions every group of hunter-gatherers or even small villages of neolithic farmers or herders, lived together as members of a single extended family, with common ancestors and common religion.

They saw in the ancestors part of the family in a special kind of environment. They were buried in the burial cave of the family, their effigies were displayed around the sacred fire of the family, and they were kept alive by occasional prayers, rites and suitable libations. It should be pointed out that the religion of the ancestor worship, as practiced by most of the Indo-Europeans, was not a religion in the strict sense of the word. Each family had its prayers, rites and sacrifices. The uniqueness of the religion was so deep in their consciousness, that when a girl married into another family, she had to renounce all contact with her previous family, including the ancestors, who were part of the family, and had to learn new prayers, rites and sacrifices, which might not have much similarity to her previous religion. In order to show that all contacts with her original family were cut, a symbolic kidnapping had to be performed and the new bride was carried over the threshold to show that she was forced to relinquish her former gods. The same applied to adoptions too. The act of adoption included a symbolic severing of all previous contacts. The symbolic severing of former family relations in the case of brides and those adopted, was

actual severing in practice. Greek and Roman history are full of cases of adoptions that were having more power than biological relations.

This religion has so much vestigial residues even in modern times, that its origins must have gone back to deep prehistory. The permanent fire of the family hearth is preserved in the permanent fire by some national monuments. The sanctity of the marriage is kept by the Christian Church; the sacred burials are replaced by national monuments to the Unknown Soldiers, together with the eternal light and there are the variations of the All-Saints day, the Halloweens and other festivals dedicated to the dead.

There was a major problem connected with that type of religion. It was suitable only for a static or near-static population. A cave or a clearing in a forest or a small vale can contain only a certain amount of people. What happens when the family becomes a clan and clans have to split off for independent existence. Who keeps the effigies of the ancestors and who worships them? In that religion, ancestors were not fond memories; they had a semi-real existence around the family hearth.

When Abraham and Lot left the family in the valley of the Balikh, they had the same problem as many of the Indo-European pastoralists had, when they had to wander from their homeland, probably because of the environment or because of demographic pressure. It seems that the very act of splitting the families had caused problems and conflicts. When the Indo-European tribes started to look for new homes, it was a time of crisis.

There were some who succeeded in transporting the original religious and social framework to the new home. Thus, when a Latin family settled somewhere in Italy where it succeeded in carving out an estate, staffed with native serfs, that the family could continue the old social customs and religion, at least for a limited time.

It worked for a while in Rome, Greece and India. It might have worked in other places too, but from these three we have detailed information. The families who had the old religion became the aristocracy of the land, lording over the lower classes. In Rome they were the Patricians, in Greece the Eupatridai, and in India the ruling and warrior castes. Although, they were known as a landed aristocracy, in fact they were the remnants of the old Indo-European religion.

One can bring examples from Rome, whose history is from a much later date, but the remnants of the old order were still active and controversial. In early Roman history, there was a Sabine nobleman, Attus Clausus, who

immigrated to Rome, together with his retainers, and was accepted as part of the ruling Roman aristocracy. Attus Clausus changed the name of his gens from Sabine Clausus to Latin Claudius, and became one of the leading patrician family in Rome. After the end of the Roman Republic, the first dynasty of Emperors was that of the Julio-Claudii; the descendants of Attus Clausus in alliance with another true-blue Roman aristocratic family, the Julii. The last emperor of that dynasty was Nero. There was another important event, that of a leading patrician family acting alone for of the Republic. That was when members of the gens Fabius waged war on Rome's behalf against Veii, another city-state, exactly as Abraham waged war against the 4 Eastern kings.

If one looks at these examples through modern eyes and modern conceptions of nation, etc., then it is difficult to accept that a powerful foreign family, like that of Attus Clausus, was accepted as a honored member of Roman society and political elite, while others, born and bred in Rome, the plebeians, were rejected. When one looks at it from the viewpoint of the ruling aristocracy, which was identical to the religious point of view too, the picture becomes clearer.

When Attus Clausus appeared at the gates of Rome with his retainers, it was at least a millenium after the original arrival of the Indo-Europeans in Latium. It is doubtful whether there was any difference between those who settled in Rome and those who settled in the hills of Sabinum. After all, there were only a few miles between them. It is possible, even probable, that there was contact between the clans of the original invaders. It is not known what caused Attus Clausus and his retainers to move to Rome, but it is possible that in Sabinum they had the same problem as later came to Rome. The plebeians, who might have been part of the native people, or descendants of clans who died out, became many and demanded political rights. After all, it was a process that happened in all the central-Italian towns. Probably, the aristocratic Clausus preferred joining the patricians in Rome to sharing power in his hometown.

When Abraham has moved to Canaan from the valley of the Balikh, he did not act as did Attus Clausus, nor as the original invaders a millenium before Attus Clausus. Abraham, and his retainers, were not part of an Indo-European invasion and did not move from one conquered territory to another. Their move could be defined as infiltration rather than invasion. He came to Canaan from an area where his family was living since time immemorial. In Canaan were already pockets of Hittites and Hurrians. His aim was to carve out a new territory for himself, and for his descendants. There is no doubt about that; it is the main motive of the Old Testament.

Abraham's behavior was very similar to the examples given about Rome. He arrived with a large number of retainers, like Attus Clausus, and waged a private war against the Eastern Kings like the Gens Fabii who waged a private war against Veii. There was, however, one major difference. The Indo-European conquerors of Italy, Greece, India and other countries, could continue their social and religious life, because they came with their ancestors, which was an integral part of their religion. It seems that in the case of Abraham it was not so. Abraham and Lot split off from the family and from the religion of the family. We know that it happened, as the Old Testament itself reported that Rachel has stolen the 'teraphim' from Laban. The lack of the accustomed religion and social order, which went back untold millennia, must have been a heavy burden on Abraham.

These thoughts do not mean that Abraham and his descendants were consciously thinking and designing a new religion. However, we do know, that wherever the Indo-Europeans went, eventually they caused a religious revolution. As the conquerors eventually combined with the conquered people, their religion soon became the amalgamation of the religions of both. The Greeks created the classical Olympian Pantheon with the gods of the conquerors and the goddesses of the conquered Pelasgians. So did the Latins, the Celts, the Germans and the Slavs. The eastern branch of the family had their share of religious revivals. The Iranians had Zoroaster; the Indians created Hinduism first, with its open form of discrimination of the Brahmins and the castes, and finally Buddhism. The Hittites (or the Armenians) had Abraham, which eventually had proven to be the seed of the religions of the western branch of the family of Indo-European speakers.

One cannot separate cultural and religious matters. It cannot be done for ancient times, when everything was pervaded by religion, also it cannot be done even in the modern world. It might be surprising to many people but the most innocent and least religious acts could turn out to have originated in ancient religions. One would not associate the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, with its eternal flame and visiting dignitaries laying wreaths with religion, but they are indeed relics of the original religion of the Indo-European tribes. Similarly, one would not see a religious act in a family Thanksgiving dinner or in a wake, but they certainly originate in ancient religious acts. The religious reformation, if one can define it so, had two results. One part of them was directly religious, and it remains so even today, and the second part contains a number of customs and habits, which could be called cultural relics of the old religion. Although the separation is artificial, the vestigial cultural elements are analyzed first and the religious

changes only after it.

Without entering into the question of the type of religious reform initiated by Abraham, the signs of the old religion, those of the Hittites, e.g. the religion of the Indo-Europeans, are clearly visible in Jewish cultural values. Some of them exist even today, others did not survive the expulsion from Palestine. Many of them are directly connected with religious rituals, but they are better defined as cultural vestiges of their Indo-European origin.

The basic principles of the Indo-European religion were that religion is personal, or more accurately they centered on the family hearth. In addition, there was a concept that dead ancestors were not really dead, but were in some halfway existence between life and death, and they had to be worshiped and fed special sacrificial meals and libations. Beyond the family god and special prayers, there was a mountaintop god who oversaw the whole Universe and the gods who were in charge of various subjects. They also believed in a duality between good and bad, between light and darkness.

There were a number of technical details that were present in the religious life of most of the Indo-European speaking tribes and many of those customs can be found in the Jewish religion. As those customs are not found in any other Semitic religion, they must be memories from the Indo-European part of their ancestors.

In ancient Rome, there were a number of special officials, called viatores – messengers. Some of those officials had religious duties, like the Levites of the Israelis. One of their duties was to go round the city on the eve of religious holidays and warn the public that the holiday is near and all work must stop. The same custom was practiced by the Jews in Judea and also in the exile.

In addition to these officials, there were priesthood in Rome, Greece and India, whose duties exactly corresponded to the duties of the Levites among the Jews. The same was with the Cohen among the Jews and the Brahmins in India, and some special college of priests in Rome and in Greece. The restrictions on the Cohen, as for special behavior in marriage, entering cemeteries, etc., were the same as the restrictions on the Brahmin. Of course, the Brahmin in India had more rules for keeping their purity, but in India they had to separate the Indo-Europeans from the natives, which was not necessary among the Jews.^{[2](#)}

The dietary restrictions of the Jews are well known. It is also known that the

dietary restriction on Indians, especially on the Brahmins is stricter still. A great part of the Jewish restrictions is connected to the way of slaughtering and preparing meat. The present Indians are not allowed to eat meat in any form, but it is a relatively new development. Originally, the Indians were allowed to eat meat, but had to follow a similar process as the Jews do today. It was not in India alone. The laws of ancient Greek cities stipulated that all meat offered for sale had to have been prepared by ritual slaughter.³

Part of the religious reforms initiated by Abraham was the circumcision that had to be performed on the seventh day after the birth. The act of the circumcision was a form of family ritual, where the newborn son was accepted into the Covenant. The original Indo-European societies had a similar acceptance ritual, when the newborn son had to be presented to the family and to the family gods, and officially received into the family. It was done without the circumcision, as it was a specific East African custom, which reached Canaan through Egypt. In Rome the ritual of acceptance had to be done on the ninth day after birth, in Greece it was on the tenth day and in India on the tenth or the twelfth.⁴

In the countries where the Indo-Europeans were the dominant factors, the religion was that of the family hearth and the effigies of the ancestors were objects of worship. Eventually the community had taken over the functions of the families. Instead of family worship of the ancestors, there was a public cult of heroes; an official permanent fire replaced the family hearth, and epic poems and hymns replaced the secret prayers and rituals. Even Christianity did not change much. The heroes were replaced by saints, the flickering candles in the cathedrals the permanent fire maintained by the Vestal Virgins, and the hymns sung by the priests the epic poems. The basic elements of the old religion were carefully kept.

If we wish to see how these elements fared with the descendants of Abraham, then there is not much difference between their practice and what was described above. There is evidence of family worship, according the original Indo-European customs, there is worship of heroes and there is epic poetry. After all, a big part of the Old Testament is epic poetry, and it is full of heroes; starting by the Patriarchs and ending by the heroes of the revolts against the Greeks and Romans. It should be added here, that the cult of heroes is unknown among the other Semitic people in the Near East, and there is also no epic poetry comparable to the Old Testament.

The view of death is much different among the descendants of Abraham from that of the other Semitic people in the Levant. At the funeral the eldest

son has to say a prayer for the dead; that prayer has to be repeated at each anniversary of the funeral and a long-burning candle is lit each year to honor the dead. It is a modern version of the perpetual fire of the family hearth⁵.

Even the original Indo-European concept which sees the dead in a sort of halfway existence between life and oblivion has examples in the Old Testament, which means that it was accepted as valid by those who wrote it and by those who read or heard it. When King Saul wanted to know what would be the outcome of the battle on the Mount Gilboa with the Philistines, he went to the village of Endor where a witch made a seance and called up the ghost of the Prophet Samuel. (I. Sam, 28:14). The Old Testament reported on the meeting with the witch and the calling up of the ghost of Samuel, without comment, only remarking that it was against the law.

Probably the best witness to the signs of Indo-European customs among the descendants of Abraham is recorded in I. Sam. 19 – 20 and it involves David, the hero of Israel. The chapters above tell the story how Saul became envious of David and decided to eliminate him. He sent people to bring David to him. Michal, David's wife and Saul's daughter, understood the danger and put one of the teraphim (idol) on the bed and covered it with a blanket. When the messengers came to fetch David, she said that David is sick and he is sleeping on the bed.

In the meantime, David had escaped and met his friend Jonathan. When he told his story to Jonathan, he was asked what he could do for him? David told him that if Saul asks Jonathan about David, he should say that he had to go to Beit-Lechem, his hometown:

"...for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family." (I Sam. 20:6)

In this chapter there are all the signs of the Indo-European religion of ancestors and the family hearth. David had 'teraphim' which is an effigy of an ancestor and there was a yearly sacrifice for the family, so it is a ritual of the family. It should be mentioned here, that Beit-Lechem is between Jerusalem and Hebron. The first was Jebusite, which is Hurrian, and the second Hittite.

It seems that Beit-Lechem was also Hittite. When Abraham first came to Canaan he visited Hebron and bought a burial cave there. Hebron was then Hittite. If one collects the fact that the family had a private burial cave, that they had 'teraphim' as the case of Rachel with Laban, and Michal and David

show, and that a family had a yearly sacrifice for members of the family, then one has all the signs of the Indo-European religion of the family.

A few of the vestigial cultural factors were shown here. There are many more but these are sufficient to prove the point. Now, the second part of the chapter, that of the religion, is evaluated.

What exactly was the religious reform, or revolution, initiated by Abraham? First, it involved a direct connection, which eventually brought on a covenant between the Lord and Abraham. As a covenant was a form of contract at the time of the Patriarchs, so there are a number of questions to be asked.



What is a covenant?



Who were the two sides of the contract?



What were the subjects of the covenant; what was given and what was taken?

Covenant is an agreement, like a compact or a league. It is not only a covenant with God. Gen.21:27-32 tells about a covenant between Abraham and Abimelech, and the main subject of the covenant was a well, which was taken violently by Abimelech's servants. A covenant at the time of the Patriarchs was a type of contract that involved a sacrifice of an ass. It also involved a complex ritual including swearing of oaths and promising retributions if the stipulations of the covenant were not kept.

Many covenants were found in Near Eastern archives from the period of the Patriarchs. They are religious or secular; there were covenants between equals and covenants between suzerains and vassals. The formats of the covenants are always similar. They contain:

Preamble

Historical prologue

Fundamental stipulations as for future relations

Specific stipulations

Curses and blessings

Of course, a proper covenant required a sacrifice of an ass to give it a religious dimension. In one of the documents, found at the excavations of Mari, the following expression was used:

"The slaying of an ass between X and Y."⁶

The connection between covenants and the sacrifice of an ass, was preserved in the name of the people of Shechem, with whom Jacob and his sons had such an unpleasant meeting. The name of their ruler was Hamor (Ass) and their tribal deity was Baal-Brith (Lord of the Covenant).⁷

The expression of covenant appears many times in the Book of Genesis, and not always in connection with the Patriarchs. The first covenant was with Adam and Eve, promising divine favor for total obedience. (Gen. 2:16-17). That covenant was broken, and the details of its breach are known. The second covenant was with Noah, when Noah was promised that the world will never again be destroyed by flood. Finally, there were many covenants between the Lord and Abraham. Not all of them were according to the legal formula.

At the beginning of the connections, the Lord has instructed Abraham to leave his country and his father's house and go to a land, which will be shown him by the Lord. That land will belong to him and to his descendants. (Gen.12:1-3). The second connection is described in Gen.13:14-17 when the Lord has repeated the first promise. It continued in Gen. 15 when the Lord has not only promised Abraham the rule over Canaan but also described the borders of the country; from the river of Egypt to the river of Euphrates. It followed in Gen. 17 – 18, when the Lord again promised Abraham many descendants and finally in Gen.22, when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his firstborn son and only a timely divine intervention stopped the sacrifice.

So, the covenant between God and Abraham did not exactly follow the prescribed structure, but it continued many years and in many installments. There were a number of important points that were repeated time and time again:

Abraham will have many descendants

Canaan will belong to Abraham's descendants

The Lord, the first part of the Covenant, will be the God of Abraham and his descendants.

As a sign of the Covenant, the descendants of Abraham, who will be part of the Covenant, should be circumcised. Whoever from the people remains uncircumcised, shall be cut off from the people; he has broken the Covenant. What have the Israelites given for all the gifts. In the Covenant, Yahweh has adopted Israel as his people and, as a jealous God, demanded total allegiance from them. They were to worship no other god but Yahweh.

That was indeed the beginning of monotheism. It has received an explicit statement much later at the time of the exile in Babylon:

"I am Yahweh, and there is none else, there is no God beside me." (Isaiah, 45:5)

These are the details of the Covenant. There are a number of subjects that are unexplained and should be explored. What was the name of the God who was part of the Covenant and what are the historical sources for the circumcision?

The name of gods had special meaning in ancient times. In many cases, they were unknown, except to those who worshiped them, and were jealously kept so that no unauthorized person could access it. Sir James Frazer wrote about the taboo of revealing gods' name:

"My father devised my name; my father and my mother gave me my name, and it remained hidden in my body since my birth, that no magician might have magic power over me."⁸

According to Jewish tradition, the real name of God was not revealed to the Patriarchs. In Exodus 15:2, it is explicitly written that when the Lord appeared to Moses, He said that:

"I am the Lord: and I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name El-Shaddai, but by my name Yahweh was I not known to them."

This is what is written in the Bible. However, it is known from many non-Biblical source that the name Yahweh, or names very similar to it, were very well known in the Middle East, and even beyond, at the time of the Patriarchs. It is easy to follow religious affiliations because of the habit of using theophoric names. The word theophoric means that within the names of individuals the name of a god or goddess is included. It was important for rulers, but it was a near common practice for individuals to bear the names of gods whose favor they or their parents sought.

In the Semitic world, the name of God was El, so a common attachment was '-el' or '-il' or '-ilu', depending on the dialect. Thus we can look at the name Michael, and we know that in the original it was 'Mi-ka-il' – meaning 'Who is like El?' or Gabriel, originally 'Gavri-el' meaning 'My hero is El'.

There was another common theophoric attachment in the forms of '-ya' or '-yaw' or '-yahu'. It did not appear much in the solidly Semitic areas, but it appeared much in the border areas, between the Semitic and the non-Semitic world. It was a common theophoric element, much before the period of the Patriarchs.

There was a proto-Indo European god in the Indus valley at about 2900 BC. The name of the god was Yayash, Yaw or Yave. It was a protective god whose symbol was a tree. The name was also known and used by the Sumerians, much before the time of the Patriarchs. One of the names of the Sumerian moon-goddess was Iahu. 'Ia' in Sumerian means 'exalted' and 'Hu' means 'dove', so 'Iahu' meant 'exalted dove'. It should be mentioned here that the Sumerian moon-goddess had two main temples. One temple was in the south, in Ur on the Euphrates, where some scholars put Abraham's origin and the second in Harran in the valley of the Balikh. Whether Abraham came from the south or from the north, he certainly had close contact with the name of the goddess.

The Egyptians also knew the name Iahu. It was one of the names of Set and also of Horus. It is interesting to note, that those who unified Egypt were called 'the sons of Horus' and the road between Gaza in Canaan and Egypt was 'the road of Horus'. Set was the enemy of Osiris who killed him in the guise of a boar. In the Egyptian mythology Set was associated with Asia, so both uses point to the same direction.^{[9](#)}

The name was also known in Syria, as Yahveh – meaning 'a sacred animal or organization, and in Hebron where the consort of Baalith was Elath-Iahu. It appears also on the tablets of Mari, showing that the name was well known by the Amorites.^{[10](#)} The most prominent use of the name Yahweh, or Yaw, was in the north-Syrian town of Ebla, which was on the border between the Semitic and non-Semitic world. In the 24th – 23rd centuries BC there was a religious reform in Ebla, initiated by the king of Ebla, named Ebrum or Ibrium, where the theophoric parts of the names were changed from 'el' or '-il' to that of '-ya'. Thus the name Mi-ka-il was changed to Mi-ka-ya, meaning exactly the same.

It was an important religious reform, and it obviously had some hidden political agenda. It must have been perfectly clear to the people in Ebla, but for us it is so far back in time that we can only guess the meaning of the change. It is, however, a fact that the name of Yahweh, Yaw or Iahu were in common use in the Middle East and beyond.^{[11](#)}

There is one more and important reference to the use of the name Yahweh, although the reference is from a date after the period of the Patriarchs. In the mountainous area of Seir, east of the valley that connects the Dead Sea with the Red Sea, in the present Kingdom of Jordan, there was a tribe of Bedouins, called the Shashu. In Egyptian lists there are references to 'Yhw in the land of the Shashu'. It is difficult to jump to conclusions, but already in the period of the Judges and early Monarchy (Judges 5:4-5, I Kings 19) there are references of 'Yahweh coming forth from Seir' and 'originating in Edom'. There is one logical explanation to these references. It is possible that when the historical Israel was created by the amalgamation of various elements, among them the tribe of the Shashu of Seir¹², who worshiped Yahweh and eventually it was accepted by all of Israel. As the Shashu came from the south, they joined the tribes of Judah, which ultimately became the dominant religious element in Israel. How the Shashu came to worship Yahweh remains a secret, but it should be remembered that the first ruler of Edom was Esau, the grandson of Abraham.

Whenever and wherever the name Yahweh had reached the Shashu, and through them the Israelites, by about 1000 BC it had an absolute dominance. This fact should be seen not only as a theological fact, but as an important political statement. The god of the Semitic word is El (or Allah as it is known today). The name appears in the Old Testament too, indeed it is the theophoric part of the name Israel – 'God will fight'. The dominant position of Yahweh in Jewish religious consciousness had a political cause and political results.

When the united Monarchy has split into two after the death of Solomon, the northern part was called Israel and the southern part Judah. In the north there were many religious upheavals; Syria and Phoenicia were to the north of Israel and they influenced her. South of Judah there was the desert, so there was less influence. The famous competition of the Prophet Eliyahu with the fifty prophets of Baal, was on the Carmel, which was in Israelite territory. Even the name of Eliyahu was provocative – it means 'My god is Yahu'. It is entirely possible that the descendants of the Shashu dominated the ruling elite of the southern kingdom, and they kept their loyalty to Yahweh, better than their northern kindred, who constantly wobbled between Yahweh, El and Baal.

By the end of the first millennium BC, the victory of Yahweh was complete, at least as far as the united monarchy was concerned, but even beyond. Jewish religion was centered on the temple in Jerusalem and it was Yahwist. At that time, the competition must have been meaningful, and at times probably violent too. In our time there is a dualism in personal

Hebrew names, which are the residual effects of that competition. Of course, the bearers of those names hardly know what the names mean and what are the alternatives to them.

'Azar-ya' means 'God helped' and 'El-azar' means exactly the same. 'Uri-el' means 'God is my light' and 'Uri-yah' means exactly the same. However, when today someone names his son Uriel or Uriyah, he does not see any religious meaning. When in King David's time there was a high-ranking officer, named Uriyah the Hittite, it was obvious that a Hittite could not have been named Uriel, so it must have been Uriyah.

If the Israelites received the name Yahweh from the Shashu of Seit, from where did the Shashu receive it? It is entirely possible that it reached them at the time of the Patriarchs, and it reached the Patriarchs from non-Semitic, probably Hittite sources. It could not have reached them from the Semitic tribes in Canaan, as the Semitic world was, and still is, loyal to El as the name of God. It did not have to be the Patriarchs. In the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, about 40 % of the names of the rulers in Canaan had either Indo-European or Horrite names so the Shashu, if the name of Yahweh had indeed originated from them, had plenty of opportunity to be in contact with non-Semitic religions.

The physical expression of the Covenant was the circumcision. It was so commanded in Gen. 17:11-14. It is explicitly written there, that whoever is not circumcised, has no part in the Covenant. The style of the chapter is very clear. The injunction applies only to those who will be born in Abraham's house or in his descendants', or will be bought by them. That means that even slaves of the members of the covenant are required to belong to it.

Where did the custom originate, when and why? The answer to all these questions is not entirely clear. It is known that the custom originated somewhere in East Africa and from there has reached Egypt. According to Herodotus II.104, the custom was very old already in his time, and was common practice in Egypt and in Ethiopia. Based on Egyptian sources, it was in practice in Egypt already at about 3000 BC. However, it was not general and not compulsory. Mummies of the priestly caste show that for the priests it was general, but not for the other castes.

There were many who attempted to solve the problem of the origin of the circumcision. Voltaire wrote that the custom went back at least 5 – 7000 years. It certainly started before the existence of metal tools, as ritual and religious circumcisions are performed with obsidian knives.

At the time of the Patriarchs, it was already an accepted practice in Egypt, Canaan and the neighboring countries. Jeremiah 9:25 wrote that Egypt, Judah, Edom, Amon, Moab and the Arabs practiced circumcision, the Assyrians, the Elamites and the Indo-European tribes did not. The prophet Ezekiel later added the Zidonians too, and claimed that the Edomites have stopped the practice. He was correct, as the later Hasmonaean king, Johanan Hyrcanus compelled the Edomites to renew the custom.

In earlier times, the Canaanites were probably circumcised, although the Bible keeps quiet on this subject. The Philistines were definitely not circumcised, which led King Saul to demand a bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins when David wanted to marry Michal, Saul's daughter. The Hivites of Shechem were also not circumcised, which brought them to a gory end by the hands of Jacob's sons. The Hivites were a Hurrian tribe, living in Canaan, like the Jebusites in Jerusalem.

It seems that in many cases, the custom went into abeyance, as with the Edomites, and only the Jews, and probably the Arabs, kept it all the time. The origin of the custom is still a matter of speculation. In East Africa it was probably a puberty rite, where the circumcision was a visible sign of reaching manhood. But there were other uses too. When David asked Saul for his daughter's hand, Saul has demanded a bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins.¹³ It does seem to be a barbaric custom, but then one can find in Egyptian archives that the practice was widespread and certainly was not invented by King Saul.

The Egyptian practice was to cut off the penis of slain enemies as a trophy. If the enemy was circumcised then his right arm was cut off.¹⁴ It was not only a question of trophies; the mercenary soldiers employed by the Egyptians received their bonus according the tally of the body parts.

It seems that the acceptance of the circumcision as an outward sign of belonging should be assigned to the change of ethnicity of the tribe. They lived among Semites, who all practiced circumcision; they accepted it as they accepted most, if not all, of their habits. Whenever the question of religious customs and laws are concerned, one should always keep in mind the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, he was much nearer in time to the events, than we are now. He wrote these lines about Jerusalem, but it applies to the whole of Israel: "Your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite." (Ezekiel 16:45)

It is clear enough.

Notes

1. Fustel de Coulanges, op.cit., p.24; Ignatius Hunt, op.cit.,p.84; Cyrus H. Gordon, op.cit.,p.127; Samuel Noah Kramer, *The Sumerians*, op.cit.,p.294 claims that the Sumerians also had a concept of a personal god. They probably originated from somewhere in central Asia, and might have had the same concepts as the Indo Europeans.
2. Riane Eisler, op.cit., p.7/24
3. Barbara Ehrenreich, *Blood Rites*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 1992, p.37, quotes from Heesterman:*The Broken World of Sacrifice: An Essay in Ancient Indian Ritual*, University of Chicago, Chicago, 1993, p.7
4. Fustel de Coulanges, op.cit. p.53
5. Mark W. Hamilton, *Aspects of family Religion in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, Christian Scholars Conference, Abilene Christian University, 1997,pp. 5-7/9
6. Archives Royales de Mari, Paris, 1950, Vol. II. Par.,37,11.6.11
7. Merrill F. Unger, op.cit.,p.126
8. Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough (Abr. Edition)*, MacMillan and Co.,London, 1963,p.343
9. Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*, op.cit. ,pp. 369-370
10. R.de Vaux, *The Revelation of the Divine Name, YHWH*, in *Proclamation and Presence*,pp.52-56; Frank More Cross, *Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs*, Harvard Theological Review, 55 (1962), p.262
11. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Mythical Past*, op.cit., pp.175-176; Cyrus H. Gordon, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1997,p.250; Riane Eisler, op.cit., p.19/24
12. Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1992, pp. 272 – 273 Sigmund Freud, op.cit. PP.56-57: The name appears also in Iupiter, Iovis, Iacchus, and in modern names as John,Jean, Johann,etc
13. I Samuel 18:25
14. Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age*, op.cit., pp. 49 - 51

THE PATRIARCHS



The Historical Narrative

The previous chapters of the book analyzed the relevant parts of the Book of Genesis and compared the stories to the known facts of the Middle East history of that period. The first of the questions that the analysis of the book had to solve was the period of the stories. Judging from circumstantial evidences the probable period of the Patriarchs was one of a deep crisis, at the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC, when Canaan was practically depopulated, Egypt was in the First Intermediate Period and Mesopotamia was overrun by Semitic infiltrators from the west. It was a very troubled time, probably caused by a serious climatic deterioration.

The Book of Genesis starts with the myth of the creation of the world, the creation of the first pair of humans, the Garden of Eden, etc. The analysis of the book, however, starts with the expulsion from the Garden of Eden and ends with Jacob's return from Harran to Canaan. The story of the return, the episode with Shechem and the descent to Egypt are not parts of this book. There is a reason for these omissions, and that reason is the basic difference between the story of the Old Testament and the historical narrative. The Old Testament tells a story of a family. That family arrives to Canaan from somewhere in the north (or out of the south of Mesopotamia) and after many adventures they reach their goal. The goal is the execution of a divine promise; to fill the Land of Canaan with Abraham's descendants and rule that land in its entirety. The road to that goal was long and tortuous; it went through slavery in Egypt, escape and a long incubation period under a loose tribal confederacy. The goal was reached only after a very long time, under the United Monarchy with David and even then it was very short-lived.

The Old Testament did not comment on the ethnicity of the players, neither is it concerned with possible changes in their ethnic belongings, although there are a number of curious facts and contradictions, for which the Old Testament does not give any convincing answer, or any answer at all.

The analysis of this book sees the story from a completely different angle. It sees a clan, or an extended family, moving south from somewhere in northeastern Turkey into Canaan. Its ethnicity is problematic, as it came originally from a territory that later in history belonged to historic Armenia but lived for a long period in an area where the population was mixed between Hurrians and Hittites. After reaching Canaan, it adapted itself to the new environment and after a few generations it emerged as a Semitic entity, although there were many important cultural and religious signs that pointed to their pre-Semitic existence.

There is only one story; there are two viewpoints. The following pages present the historical narrative of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, as they appear after a historical analysis. The narrative is told in two distinct parts:



The first part is the story of the family as it could be extracted from the Book of the Genesis and evaluated against known non-Biblical sources.



The second part is the story of the transformation of the family, or the tribe, from one ethnicity to another. This is really the main story with importance to similar histories of all periods, past or present.

* * *

The story should have been started with 'Once upon a time' as in a fairy tale, as the beginning of the Book of the Genesis is indeed a fairy tale. It tells the story of the creation of the world, that of the first family, the sojourn in the Garden of Eden and the story of their expulsion from it. It is a legitimate aim; each nation has its founding fathers, historical or mythical, and the Israelis are no exception. Also each Middle Eastern people had its myth of creation, and here too the Israelis were not exceptions. That most of them borrowed from each other, was also an accepted practice.

This book, however, is supposed to be a book of history and not of mythology, so it starts the analysis after the creation and after the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. There was a partially successful effort to locate the probable site of the Biblical Garden of Eden. It was done not to prove a mythological tale but to establish a possible point of departure for a family, whose story was told in the Book of Genesis. The establishment of the possible location of the Garden of Eden and the recent discovery of the

actual Flood of Noah, which was in the middle of 6th millennium BC put the story of the Patriarchs, and the whole of the early turbulent history of the Middle East in a completely different light.

According to recent discoveries, which hopefully will answer many more questions that are still shrouded in mystery, the historical narrative can start with a story of a family, who lived somewhere in the valley of Tabriz, what is today in Iranian Azerbeidjan, and which was in ancient times part of historical Armenia. That the family came from a territory that later was part of historical Armenia, is not a recent discovery. Although this book reached that fact by carefully analyzing the biblical details and the map of the area, Robert Graves reached the same conclusion about 50 years ago. He wrote that Abraham was a long-traveled Armenian tribe who reached Canaan and settled there. This book accepts Graves' definition only partially.

The reason for the partial acceptance is that this book does not accept national, ethnic or racial differentiation at such an early period. It is very possible that the family has indeed originated in a territory that later became part of historical Armenia, but it does not make it Armenian. At the most, it can be established that the family originated in the southern fringe of a territory that probably was the homeland of the proto-Indo-Europeans. The possibility of Armenian ethnicity was still far in the future. So, whenever the question of ethnicity appeared in this book, it was left open and unanswered. The reason for it is not political correctness, but a conviction that one cannot transfer concepts of the late 2nd millennium AD to the 7th or 8th millennium BC. It is obvious that even at that time there might have been differences between proto-Indo-Europeans and proto-Semites or proto-Dravidians, but it is extremely doubtful that there could have been a differentiation between proto-Latins and proto-Greeks, for example.

It is possible that even at that time, there were differences between western and eastern proto-Indo-Europeans, between the 'centum' and the 'satem' groups, just as it is possible that even in their homeland, there were differences between northern and southern Semitic tribes. However, it seems that the final differentiation was made by the end-station and not by the point of departure. After they settled down, mixed with the native people, and created their unique language or dialect, it was decided whether they became Celts, Latins or Greeks.

That family from the valley of Tabriz left its homeland for the Euxine Lake, the sweet water lake which later became the Black Sea. They left because of generally bad weather, drought and famine. It is possible that it was part

of the Younger Dryas, or some independent worsening of conditions in the Middle East. The worsening climate chased them out of the Garden of Eden; that was the real expulsion. They were not alone there. There are archaeological remains which show that the Middle East emptied at that time and people concentrated around the Euxine Lake, which was a huge oasis. Then the waters of the Mediterranean broke through the dam of the Bosphorus and filled Euxine Lake with seawater, which was the real flood of Noah. The family succeeded in escaping from the flood, did not return to their original country but went south and settled east of the upper Euphrates, in the valley of the river Balikh, one of its major subsidiaries.

The area where the family had settled down, was a borderline between the Semites from the south, the Indo-Europeans from the north and west, and the Caucasians from the north and east. In that particular territory, there are many names of villages and towns, which point to the ancestors of the clan, Nahor, Peleg, Terach, etc. are all Semitic names. There are other names too. Arpaxad was one of the ancestors and it was definitely not a Semitic name.

The discovery of the real Flood of Noah gave answers to many unsolved problems. It solved once for all, the question of Ararat that occupied countless archaeologists, explorers and general adventurers. Because of the story of the Bible, which was very accurate here, the final resting-place of the Ark was on the Mount Ararat, which is near the Black Sea. However, if there was a general flood, based on southern Mesopotamia, then for the Ark to reach Ararat, it had to pass many mountains between Ararat and southern Mesopotamia. That means that for a flood, based in southern Mesopotamia, which brought the Ark to Ararat, it must have had a depth of thousands of meters, which is very unlikely. If the flood was in the north, in the Black Sea area, then the role of Ararat is realistic. It is the largest mountain beside the Black Sea.

The second riddle to which the discovery of the real Black Sea gave an answer is that of the Hittites. It is known without doubt that Hittite is an Indo-European language. However, its vocabulary is so different from other Indo-European languages, that it was decided that the Hittites were the first proto-Indo-European people that left the original homeland. However, it did not fit with other historical data about the migrations of the Indo-European tribes.

According to Marija Gimbutas' Kurgan Hypothesis, there were three waves of migrations into Europe from the Pontic steppes, the homeland of the proto-Indo-European tribes. The first wave was at about 4400 BC, the

second wave a millennium after it and the third at about 2800 BC. She placed the Hittite invasion of Asia Minor in the second wave, in 3400 BC, but then the large linguistic differences between Hittite and Greek do not fit the comparatively short period between 3400 BC and 2800 BC. Apart of the case of the Hittites, her theory is realistic. The Flood of the Black Sea was at about 5500 BC.

After the discovery of the real Flood of Noah, it seems that the Hittites did not invade Asia Minor in the 4th millennium BC but remained there in the middle of the 6th millennium BC. They were native to the area and were cut off from their kin, when the Euxine Lake turned into the Black Sea, and the Bosphorus in the west and the Caucasus in the east closed effectively future contacts between them. This change gives a proper answer to the difference in the languages.

It is possible that the family of the Patriarchs originated in Armenia, but the disaster of the Euxine Lake cut them off from their kin who remained on the northern shore of the Sea. Those from the proto-Indo-Europeans who remained on the south shore of the Sea were called Hittites, whatever their actual origin was, and this book assumes that the Patriarchs were part of that group. The early origin of the Hittites south of the Black Sea can also explain the early existence of the Hittites in Canaan.

Between the Flood of the Black Sea and the period of Abraham, there were about three and half millennia. According to Marija Gimbutas, between 4400 BC and 2800 BC, there were three waves of migrations to the west from the Pontic Steppe, e.g. from those who remained north of the Black Sea after the flood. It means that it took about a millennium for the survivors to recuperate from the catastrophe, gather strength and fill the ranks, before the demographic pressure compelled them to migrate. It is entirely possible that south of the Black Sea there was a similar process. First, a period of recuperation and strengthening, and then migration and infiltration south and east.

According to the Old Testament, the Hittites were native to Canaan. It might mean that the local Hittites, who were established in the highlands of the country, were living there much before Abraham and Lot arrived, although it seems that they kept their Hittite laws, customs and identity. It also meant that when Abraham and his party arrived to Canaan, they did not come to terra incognita; they came to a land where they might have had relations or at least people of the same background as they were.

But why did they come? It was already said that the probable period of the Patriarchs was a time of environmental crisis. Canaan was nearly empty; it is estimated that between 100 – 140,000 lived there, which is extremely low, even in the conditions of early history. Today living in that territory are between 6 to 9 million people. That was the First Intermediate Period in Egypt and the time of troubles in Mesopotamia. The worsening climate affected everyone; it might have affected the valley of the Balikh too. There is also a question whether Abraham and his retainers were a nomadic tribe, or were already sedentary. There are many arguments, pro and con, of this subject.

Ignatius Hunt thought that the patriarchs were no longer nomads, but neither were they completely sedentary. Others, like de Vaux or Kathleen Kenyon, thought that they were in the process of settling down, moving into the fertile coastlands where they were living in their tents among, but separate from, the Canaanites. This is the impression one gets from the description of the Bible. The life of the Patriarchs at Hebron, Beer Sheba, Gerar, Beith-El and Shechem fit the views of the scholars.

It is possible that in the north, in their previous homeland, they had a more settled existence. The villages and towns, named after Nahor, Peleg and Terach, probably show that they had a settled center. When, at a later time, Abraham has sent a servant back to the home-country to fetch a bride for his son, or when Isaac and Rebecca have sent their son Jacob, they gave fixed addresses, as names of towns and villages. It means that even if they were cattle nomads, they had a fixed and settled center of life.

There were conditions that compelled part of the family, Abraham and Lot, to leave the old country and find their luck in Canaan. We cannot know what was the cause of that decision. Bad climate, overgrazing, wars, etc. are all possible causes. On the other hand, the hill country of Canaan was practically unoccupied. The reduced population lived either in the coastland, or in the northern and eastern valleys. Whoever lived in the hill country of Canaan, or in the dry lands of the south, were the Hittites. It should be mentioned here, that when Abraham and Lot moved south, there were a number of other processes of infiltration. The Amurru –'westerners' infiltrated Mesopotamia, and the Hurrians moved south and west from their homeland, which was in southern Caucasus. All these restless movements of people only reinforce the view that conditions in the Middle East were unsettled.

Looking at the activities of the tribe of Abraham in Canaan, one can see that they are on two levels. On the level of local politics, they became a

factor. On one hand, the total population of Canaan at that time was between 100,000 and 140,000 people. On the other hand, the tribe of Abraham alone could field a force of 318 armed retainers. Counting the families of the retainers, the number of the people in the tribe must have been way over a thousand. They must have become a power in a depopulated country. The Hittites of Hebron have certainly saw in Abraham an important person. On the other hand, they had problems like any other family. Professor Barry Beitzel, from the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School wrote that the story of the Book of Genesis is about men getting wives, wives getting babies and babies getting inheritances. These are family worries and not geopolitical history.

Up to now it was conventional history of the Patriarchs in Canaan. It fits a history of a tribe with considerable power in an impoverished and depopulated country. The chief of the tribe had family problems, which he could have easily solved if he only would abandon his loyalty to concepts on which he was brought up and accept those of the local population, among whom he was living. Abraham had no son; there was no continuation in the family. He was not sterile; he had concubines and had children from them. His problem was that in his original environment, marriage was sacred, one could have concubines but continuation of the family could have been done only through a son from the wife. In the Semitic population, where Abraham lived in Canaan, one could have had more than one wife and there was no restriction on the rights of any of the sons to continue the family. Abraham could not do it and here is the explanation why not?

Abraham and his tribe moved to Canaan and settled down in a friendly way. The reason for the friendliness was simple enough. Canaan was depopulated because of climatic conditions. According to the Book of Genesis, there was barely enough grazing for one herd; so Lot had to descend to the valley of the Jordan, and settle in the cities of the Plain.

In Canaan there were other Hittites who probably lived there for a long time, even for hundreds of years. Abraham met them in Hebron and in Beer Sheba. It cannot be known what percentage they were of the total population and what was their occupation? They were probably the lords of manor, owners of estates, worked with serfs or with sharecroppers. How they managed in bad climatic condition when their serfs escaped from the country? There are no answers to these questions in the Book of Genesis.

It is known from the Amarna letters, which was a few hundred years after the period of the Patriarchs, that the percentage of Indo-European personal

names in Canaan was nearly 40 % of the total. They were probably not only Indo-European names but Hurrian names as well. The Egyptians at the time of Amenophis II and also under the Pharaoh Thutmose III, gave Canaan the name Kharru, which was derived from Hurru (Hurrian). Those pharaohs were about 200 years after the Patriarchs.

It was not only in Canaan. The Amarna letters mention names of rulers with Indo-European or Hurrian names. They mention Biryazawah of Damascus, Indaruta of Achshaph, Biridaswa of Yenoam, Artamanya of Zur-Bashan were rulers with Indo-European names, but there were many others, in Meggido, Keilah, Taanach, etc. There is, however, one important point that should be taken into consideration. The Amarna letters recorded the names of the rulers and not the names of the simple people. If the percentage of Indo-European sounding names among those recorded on the Amarna letters is 40, it does not mean that the general percentage was the same. There is no doubt that the bulk of the population in Canaan was solidly Semitic.

W. F. Albright has pointed out in *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p.205, that:

"We can...compare the ethnic situation in Syria and Palestine after the Hyksos Age with what existed there in the period between 2000 and 1750 Bc, which we know now from new cuneiform and Egyptian sources. At that time there was not a single non-Semitic name to be found south of Carchemish; all names were Canaanite or Amorite. Three centuries later this is changed. Canaanite and Amorite names still occur and become commoner as we move southward, but both Syria and Palestine swarms with non-Semitic personal names distributed among Hurrian, Indo-European, and a third still unidentified linguistic group."

This quotation says that after the Hyksos invasion the ethnic composition of the countries of the Levant has changed. We also know that there was a larger proportion of foreign rulers than foreign people. The normal percentage of the conquering to the conquered people was usually 1 to 10. That was the rate between Spartans and Helots in Greece, between the Hungarians and the natives in Hungary, or between the Finns and the locals in Finland. It is possible that in Canaan the percentage was about the same, but for a transitory period, that small percentage provided the ruling elite.

It was about the same all over the Middle East. The Hyksos in Egypt ruled with a tiny fraction of the population, the same was with the Kassites in Mesopotamia and the Indo-Iranians in Mitanni. Eventually, those small

minorities were dissipated; assimilated to the majority and accepted their language and names, and by the end of the millennium there were no more Indo-European or Hurrian names among the rulers. What has happened in the Middle East is what happened in many countries where the invading minority eventually accepted the language of the invaded land. That happened in Bulgaria, with the Turkish Bulgar tribe and the local Slavic people, in Normandie, where the Vikings became Normans and in England where the Normans became Englishmen.

The result of assimilation in Canaan, as far as the language was concerned was the same as in the rest of the Middle East. However, assimilation of cultures is a much wider subject than a simple acceptance of languages. Does the use of the language of the minority, which is reflected in the names of the rulers too, means that the minority rulers were expelled, or that they were culturally assimilated, or that the common language was accepted for convenience sake but the majority accepted the cultural values of the minority.

Common wisdom says that cultures with higher level will dominate cultures with lower level. As many of the maxims of common wisdom, this is also correct in some cases and incorrect in others. So the language and culture of the Romans became dominant in Gaul, and today in France they speak French and have a general Latin culture. In the same France, the Frankish invaders who were Germans, eventually accepted the language and culture of the locals. It happened in Normandie too with the Danish Vikings. However, the same process which admirably worked with Romans and Gauls, completely failed when it came to Latins and Berbers in Tunisia, and between Greeks and Semites in the Middle East.

It seems that the common law needs to have an adjustment, when it comes to cultural transfer and domination between peoples that belong to different civilizations. But here a question of possible anachronism can be raised. Today we assign countries and peoples to civilizations, but even today it is not always clear whether the assignment is indeed correct.

It should be obvious that when an invading minority accepts the language, religion and customs of the people of the land, it does not mean that all connections to the old framework were severed. Indeed, when one looks at the history of the world and examines places of mixture, then it very soon appears that the melting pots usually did not melt, and the mixture is superficial.

One can mention intercivilizational melting pots, like Cyprus or Sri Lanka,

where after many thousands of years the dividing lines are still sharp, mutually defined and carefully maintained, and increasingly violent. But there are also meeting points, which are not intercivilizations and they ought to be real mixtures by now, and we find that it is not so.

The Franks were a German tribe. They conquered Gaul at the end of the 5th century AD, accepted the Catholic religion and became French. Indeed, they became the original French aristocracy. That was about 1500 years ago. In the meantime, regimes came and went, aristocracies came and went, and then during the French Revolution, the question of unity came out into the open. Abbe Sieyes, one of the leaders of the Third Estate, wrote a pamphlet:

"Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?" – "What is the Third Estate?". He reminded his readers that the First Estate, the aristocracy, are really the descendants of the invading Franks, and the Second Estate, the clergy, was that who sold the Gauls, the fathers of the Third Estate, as slaves to the Franks.

That was really a revolutionary pathos, but 140 years after the pamphlet of Abbe Sieyes, there was an eminent French soldier, Marshal Lyautey, the pacifier of French North-Africa, who said in 1927:

"Je me sens chez moi dans toute la vallée du Rhin, à Mayence, à Cologne, parce que je suis Franc. Je ne me sens pas chez moi à Beziers."

(I feel at home in the valley of the Rhine, at Mainz and Cologne, because I am a Frank. I do not feel at home at Beziers.)

Here is a typical case of two kindred people. Celts with an admixture of Latins, and Germans. Both people have kindred languages, part of the western group of Indo-European languages, and common religion and common cultural origin. Still, after 1500 years the lines of the old divisions are still visible. It seems that memes (elements of cultural contents, equivalent of genes in biological content) have very long memories. In the Middle East of the 15th century BC there were rulers with Indo-European and Hurrian names. Five hundred years later, at about 1000 BC, all the names of the rulers were Semitic; not only in Canaan but in Syria and Mesopotamia too. What happened? Either the Indo-Europeans have left and the original Semites remained, or the Semitic majority has assimilated the Indo-European or Hurrian minority. It is not the duty of this study to analyze the history of the Middle East in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC, so the analysis is done only for Canaan.

There is not much doubt that the Patriarchs had Indo-European cultural traditions. The case of the search for Abraham's son, that of the Teraphim, which Rachel has stolen from her father, the name of the Jewish God, Yahweh, which went again all Semitic traditions are proof enough. That today, the Jews have many residual cultural effects inherited from the Indo-Europeans is well known. It is also known that there is no such residual cultural influences in other peoples of the Middle East, despite the millennium long occupation of the Middle East by Romans and Greeks, between the conquest of Alexander the Great, and Mohammed. It is possible that the exile of two millennia has influenced those cultural acquisitions but those cultural elements exist among the Jews who were in exile in Middle Eastern countries, and most of those elements appeared before the exile and in all periods of their long history.

Many of the cultural elements are connected to religion in the modern sense of the word, but there are many others that today are not considered part of religion. If one wishes to make a classification about the vestigial effects of the Hittite sojourn in Canaan at the period of the Patriarchs, then one should accept the words of the Prophet Ezekiel, who has written that Israel is a bastard son of a Hittite mother and an Amorite father. The language is Semitic, but the share of the Hittites among the cultural, and also the religious, contents is probably greater than the share of the Semites. It is certainly so today, but it was so before the exile and even at the time of the United Monarchy.

Thus, there is a great deal of cultural influence inherited by the Israelites from the Indo-Europeans who, according to the Prophet Ezekiel, were one of their parents. Why are these inherited effects exhibited by the Israelites alone, and not with other people of the Middle East? After all, there were Indo-Europeans and Hurrians in Syria and in the Levant too, probably in much greater numbers than in Canaan. The northern border of Syria was the northern border of the Semitic people. It was so 4000 years ago, and it is so today. When there is an infiltration of people or ideas, then those nearer to the border ought to be affected more than those who live further away.

When the main cultural traits of the Indo-Europeans are analyzed, it is seen that the worship of heroes and its accompanying heroic poetry are among the important ones. They certainly separate the Indo-Europeans from their neighbors. When the scene of the Middle East is surveyed, then and now, it is found that the only people having similar cultural customs are the Israelites, alone of all Middle Eastern people. We know about the Israeli

hero worship mostly from their most important epic poetry, which is embedded in the Old Testament. There are epic works comparable to the Old Testament among the Iranians, Indians, Greeks and Latins. There are no comparable epic poetry among the Semites or the Hamites. There are hymns, letters, treaties, archives and collection of laws, but there is nothing that could be compared to the Old Testament, the Avesta, the Rig-Veda or the Homeric epics. If there were vestigial cultural effects, we do not know about them.

In the chapter, Religious Interlude, it was explained that Abraham's move to Canaan placed him in a situation where he had to find a replacement for the principles on which he was brought up. The basic principles of the original Indo-European religion were the worship of ancestors and the family hearth. By his moving to Canaan he left both of them behind. When he and his son Isaac looked for brides, both turned to the family in the old country to find brides for their sons; they proved that the family was indeed separated.

Not all the movements of the Indo-Europeans into new territory implied complete severance with the past. The Indo-Europeans, who migrated to Iran, India, Greece and Western Europe, had their families with them. When the Roman army, under Marius, destroyed the invading German tribes, the Cymbri and Teutoni, who were moving across Europe in search of new home, after their previous territory was inundated by the Baltic Sea, they were together with their families, just as their forefathers were. So, if we imagine the Aryan invasion of India, it was not one of mounted barbarians, but a long line of ox-carts, packed with women and children, household stuff, and the precious war-chariots, which were too valuable to endanger them on the mountain passes. When they reached India and became the rulers, there was a continuity of families, religion and customs.

The situation was different in Canaan, and probably in the whole of the Levant. There was no organized invasion, there were individual families who reached the highlands of Canaan while leaving their families behind. There might have been groups of families too, who grasped Levantine towns and ruled in them. Even in the invasion of India, there were similar cases. The main Aryan body settled in the valley of the Indus and the Punjab. However, there were families, who struck out eastward and even reached Bengal and Calcutta, which is much farther than Canaan to Anatolia.

In addition, there is one more factor that ought to be examined. The Old Testament talks about Abraham and the Patriarchs, but also mentions that at

that time there were Hittites in Canaan. The Book of Genesis tells about Hebron and Beer-Sheba, but Numbers XIII.29 tells us that the Hittites were dwelling generally in the mountains. Their number is not known, but if the Amarna letters counts the Indo-European names among the rulers of Canaan, then their number must have been considerable. It is entirely possible that when the religious reforms of Abraham are viewed, they are really the reforms of the whole Hittite community in Canaan. It is also possible that when the Israelite tribal confederation was established, the Hittite community which was spread around the hill-country of Canaan joined the confederacy, together with the descendants of Abraham who were returning from Egypt, and those Canaanites who joined them, the Shashu of Seir and the tribe of Dan, who probably were an Aegean tribe. As the Hittites were around Hebron and Beer Sheba, they probably joined the tribe of Judah.

When the United Monarchy was split into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, the southern kingdom was more loyal to Yahweh than the northerners. This also explains the curious case of David and his first escape from the wrath of King Saul. The story was told in the chapter, Religious Interlude, where it was shown that David was from Beit-Lechem, which is in hill-country, he kept the teraphim of his family, which were the effigies of his ancestors, and his family had a yearly sacrificial meal, with the participation of the whole family. All these were Indo-European symbols, and they were kept by David, one the heroes, if not the most important hero, of Jewish history.

It is important to note that the Old Testament told that story in a simple, matter-of-fact manner, as if everybody should know what 'teraphim' are and why every family meets for a yearly sacrificial meal. It is interesting that in the case of Bat-Sheba and Urriyah the Hittite, the Old Testament does not spare David and chides him for his behavior, but passes over silently the case of the teraphim, which were idols. About the personality of Urriyah there is also very little. We do not know where he came from, but being a high ranking army officer, he probably was not a mercenary.

The Indo-European connection appeared at a much later date too. In the Hellenistic period, there were Greek scholars at the Museum of Alexandria, who thought that the Jewish people came to Palestine from India. They reached that conclusion when they observed the many similar religious customs between the Jews and the Indians. After the conquest of Alexander the Great in India, that country was opened before Greek scholars. They saw the similarities between the Jewish priestly orders, the Cohanim and the Levites, and the Indian Brahmins and other priestly castes. They also saw the similarities in the stringent dietary laws and many other common points

too. If they would have access to ancient cuneiform records, they could have found that in the Amarna letters there was a prince of Achshaph, named Indaruta. The same name appears also in the Vedas and other Sanskrit writings.

The Greek scholars made their observations on religious issues alone. They could have found similarities in other fields too. Of all the Semitic-speaking people, the Israelites were the only one with hero worship and epic poetry, funeral rites and a concept of personal gods. They were also the only people among the Semitic peoples who consistently worshiped Yahweh, and not the common Semitic gods, El or Baal.

These cultural remains should not surprise one. The period of the 2nd quarter of the 2nd millennium BC was a troubled period in the history of the ancient Middle East. That was the time of the Hyksos in Egypt, the Kassites in Mesopotamia, and last but not least, it is possible that the Indo-European invasion of India started at the Persian Gulf, and the Indo-European hordes passed the Middle East on their way. There are Middle Eastern tales of the depredations of Umman Manda, who were probably Scythians and were on their way to India.

Judging from the description of the Old Testament, the trip of Abraham and his tribe was not part of the general turmoil; it probably was rather before it. His descendants, however, were surely affected by it. The general turmoil in the Middle East and the rule of Indo-Europeans in some of the cities of Canaan has probably strengthened their loyalty to their traditions. The strength of the tradition can be seen by the fact that when the Israelite tribal alliance was established, the tribe of Dan could join the tribal confederacy without being outside the general agreement of all the other members. The tribe of Dan, was probably an Aegean tribe, named Danona, part of the Peoples of the Sea. They were a seafaring people, the Bible says that they lived on their ships. Later on they received a tribal allotment on the shore of the Mediterranean, in the vicinity of Jaffo. Eventually, they left their allotted territory and conquered a new area in the north of the Hule, which originally belonged to Sidon. After its conquest, it was renamed to Dan. Samson, one of heroes of the Israelites belonged to that tribe.

These simple examples show that the rules of mixing people are not simple at all. The mothers transmit languages and simple cultural values, whether the mothers are of the local people or they came with the warriors. The conquest of India by the Aryans and Hungary by the Hungarians two and half millennia later, resulted that in India the language was Sanskrit and in

Hungary Hungarian. The penetration by the Indo-Europeans of Canaan and the Middle East in general, was with warriors and herdsmen. Most of the mothers were, therefore, locals, so the language became Semitic. However, it was insufficient. Language is not all; there are also cultural contents, which are probably more important than language.




In the Middle East there is a paradoxical situation. It is not new, it was already the same paradox in early times before 3000 years ago. There are two peoples, both claim that they are descendants of Abraham and both speak kindred languages. Despite all that, there is not much similarity between them, not in religion and in cultural values. There is enmity between them today, because of actual political differences, but the same enmity existed 3000 years ago, then between the Israelites on one hand, and the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Moabites, and the others on the other. The enmity then, and today too, at least partially, was caused by the cultural values, installed in one by its Indo-European ancestors, and by the Semitic ancestors in the other. This is too the heritage of Abraham and the Patriarchs.

THE PATRIARCHS



Conclusion

In the Introduction and in the chapter discussing the possible historicity of the Book of Genesis, a number of questions were asked. Furthermore, the subject itself suggested the posing of another question. Following are the questions, led by the last one mentioned above:

-  The Book of Genesis described the movement of Abraham and his retainers from the border area between the Semitic and the non-Semitic world to Canaan. Can this movement, and those of his descendants, be seen as a prototype of invasion or infiltration of pastoral tribes to the Middle East?
-  In what measure can the tales of the Book of Genesis be accepted as having historical base, or are they all to be seen as pure mythology?
-  What is connection, if any, between the story told by the Book of Genesis and subsequent Jewish history?

The book provides the answers to the questions. However, the chapters are separated, either by chronology or by subjects. Here the answers to specific questions are given. It should be pointed out that the answers to the questions are interconnected and there might be a measure of overlapping, which could not be helped.

Question I.

The estimated period of Abraham's arrival in Canaan was about the turn of the 3rd – 2nd millennia BC. It was a generally unsettled period, the time of the First Intermediate Period in Egypt, economic crisis and depopulation in Canaan, and the onslaught of the Cassites in Mesopotamia. The reason for all these was probably a climatic catastrophe. Judging both from Biblical

and non-Biblical sources, it was not an invasion but an infiltration of a small tribe into the hill country of Canaan. There is no historical evidence of an invasion into Canaan at that period. It was not a first infiltration as Abraham has already found Hittites and Hurrians in Canaan, who came much before him. They were probably also not the last infiltrators as in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC about 40 % of the names of the rulers in Canaanite cities were Indo-European or Hurrians.

However, by the beginning of the Iron Age, at about 1000 BC, there were no Indo-European or Hurrian sounding names among the rulers in Canaan. There might have been a number of logical possibilities for this transformation.

The Indo-European or Hurrian speaking people became assimilated and were already Semites by the turn of the millennium.

At the end of the Bronze Age, there was a general process of destroying the centers of the previous civilization. The same process might have been active in Canaan too, and the local people destroyed or ousted the previous rulers. There might have been cases of the second possibility. There were probably enough people in Canaan who fought against the previous order, and in addition, there were two peoples who were part of the Peoples of the Sea and who actively participated in the attack on Egypt. The two peoples were the Philistines and the Danuna. The second tribe became member of the later Israeli tribal confederation. The Old Testament mentions the Danuna (Dan) as those who destroyed and conquered one of the Bronze Age strongholds in northern Galilee, who were good fighters with their long swords, and who were living on their ships when they joined the tribal alliance.

However, it seems that in the case of Canaan and in the creation of the Israelite people the first option was the dominant one.

The Book of Genesis showed the arrival of a non-Semitic tribe into Canaan. It might not have been a large tribe, but infiltration of a tribe with 318 fighting men must have been an impressive force when Canaan was depopulated because of adverse climatic conditions.

Therefore, the story of the Patriarchs shows a type of assimilation with the peoples of the land by accepting their language, but at that same time keeping the accumulated cultural values they brought with them. It is possible that there was an ethnic amalgamation and a cultural conservatism, which caused a large measure of transfer of Indo-European cultural

traditions, as they appeared in Jewish history from the beginning until today.

It seems that there were a number of causes as to why the Indo-European cultural influence was strong in Canaan and non-existent in other parts of the Levant, when there were places nearer the border to the non-Semitic world, where the influence was probably stronger.

The infiltration to Canaan by the tribe of Abraham was followed by a religious change that only strengthened the traditions behind that change. The continuing conflict in historical times between the worshipers of Yahweh on one hand, and the worshipers of Baal or El on the other, was probably a major element of that change. It is possible that the unsettled economic conditions, probably caused by a continuing drought, and its subsequent depopulation changed the proportions between the two ethnic elements, the Hittites and the Amorites, to the favor of the Hittites, because they were pastoral people and could manage with less moisture than the farmers. One of the major elements which remained from the Indo-European heritage is hero-worship and its accompanying epic poetry. The Old Testament is one of the examples of that epic poetry. Hero-worship and epic poetry are not known in other parts of the Levant.

In addition to the proportion of the Hittites to the Amorites, there were future additions to the Israelite tribal alliance. One of them was an Aegean tribe, the Danuna (Dan) who were part of the Peoples of the Sea. If such a tribe could join the Israelite tribal alliance, then the cultural contents of that alliance could not have been much different from the values of the Danuna.

The answer to the first question is that probably there were many more cases of infiltration to the Middle East by Indo-European or Hurrian tribes, as in the first half of the second millenium BC there were many Indo-European sounding names among the rulers of the whole Middle East, and not only in Canaan. However, as far as the results of such infiltration are concerned, the case of Canaan, or more accurately the Israelites, is a unique occurrence. Nowhere, in the Middle East are there residual effects of those cases of infiltration. In the whole Semitic Middle East the worship of El was proved to be stronger than that of Yahweh, with the exception of the Israelites, then and now.

Question II.

As it was predicted in the second chapter of this book, there was no direct historical evidence found which would prove the existence of the Patriarchs. However, so many archaeological evidences were found in the excavations

of the Middle East that it can be seen that the formal transactions described in the Book of Genesis: adoptions, treaties, wills, birthrights, etc. fit the period of the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd millennium BC. It is true especially in the case of treaties. As the Covenant, which is the primary subject of the Book of Genesis, is a legal document, it is important to note that treaties that were written in Mesopotamia a few centuries to either side of the patriarchal period would not match the formats of the biblical treaties at all.

There is no direct proof for any of the stories of the Book of Genesis. There are some that have 'parallel proof' meaning that there are similar cases found in archives of the same period. There are some non-Biblical names, which might or might be authentic, The family of the Patriarchs were not royalty; they were not even citizens of any of the Mesopotamian towns. They were outside barbarians who tried to get a foothold in one of the small provinces of the Middle East, which in itself was not really in the interest of anyone important. The Egyptian saw in Canaan a highway to northern Syria, to the line of the Euphrates, which was their northern line of interest, when they were powerful enough to have interest outside of Egypt. The Mesopotamian states might have been interested in economic benefits, as the invasion of the Eastern Kings has shown. But, in reality, it was a backwater.

At the most, one can say about the stories of the Book of Genesis that they are realistic within the frame of their period. This is what gives the stories their reality and power. When the canon of the Old Testament was collected, those who decided what would be part of the Old Testament were not experts in archaeology and in history. If they collected stories with accurate historical details to their assumed period, but unknown for the second half of the 1st millennium BC when it was done then it can be assumed that the stories were indeed created in their own time and not later. There is another point that cannot be pure coincidence.

One of the first assumptions of this book was that the Patriarchs were not Semites, but they became Semites after living in Canaan for a few generations. When the cultural values of their descendants are examined, it is found that among their values there are those which were inherited from their non-Semitic ancestors. There are so many of those cultural values that a whole book would be needed to describe them all, but a few more important ones were shown to be illustrations to the thesis. One cannot be sure that King David inherited his cultural values, which are unknown among his Semitic neighbors, from the Patriarchs, but he must have inherited from someone who had the same cultural values as the Patriarchs

had.

Question III

This is the most difficult of all the questions. There are stories of the Patriarchs that might or might not prove something. There are, however, a number of conclusions that can be derived from those tales:

There was probably one or more infiltration of northern pastoral nomads into Canaan. The ethnic composition of the tribes were either Indo-European, or from tribes that had close contact with Indo-Europeans. They were not Semitic. The Old Testament calls them Hittites. The story of Abraham and his descendants was probably about one of those infiltrators.

The stories fit the profile of the period of the late 3rd millennium – early 2nd millennium BC. Later, historical Israel traced its beginning as well the beginning of its religion to that group of Patriarchs. Indeed, historical Israel was first mentioned explicitly on the Merneptah Stele, erected in the late 13th century BC. Historic Israel showed a close cultural affinity to values that are usually associated with Indo-Europeans. There is no historical proof that the origin of the Indo-European influence on Israelite cultural values came from that tribe whose story was told by the Book of Genesis. So, as far as history goes, it is entirely possible that the family of Patriarchs have disappeared without leaving traces, and the obvious Indo-European cultural signs which are so obvious in Jewish consciousness, originated from different sources. It is possible, but highly unlikely.

This is the situation as far as history goes. There are a number of comments on it:

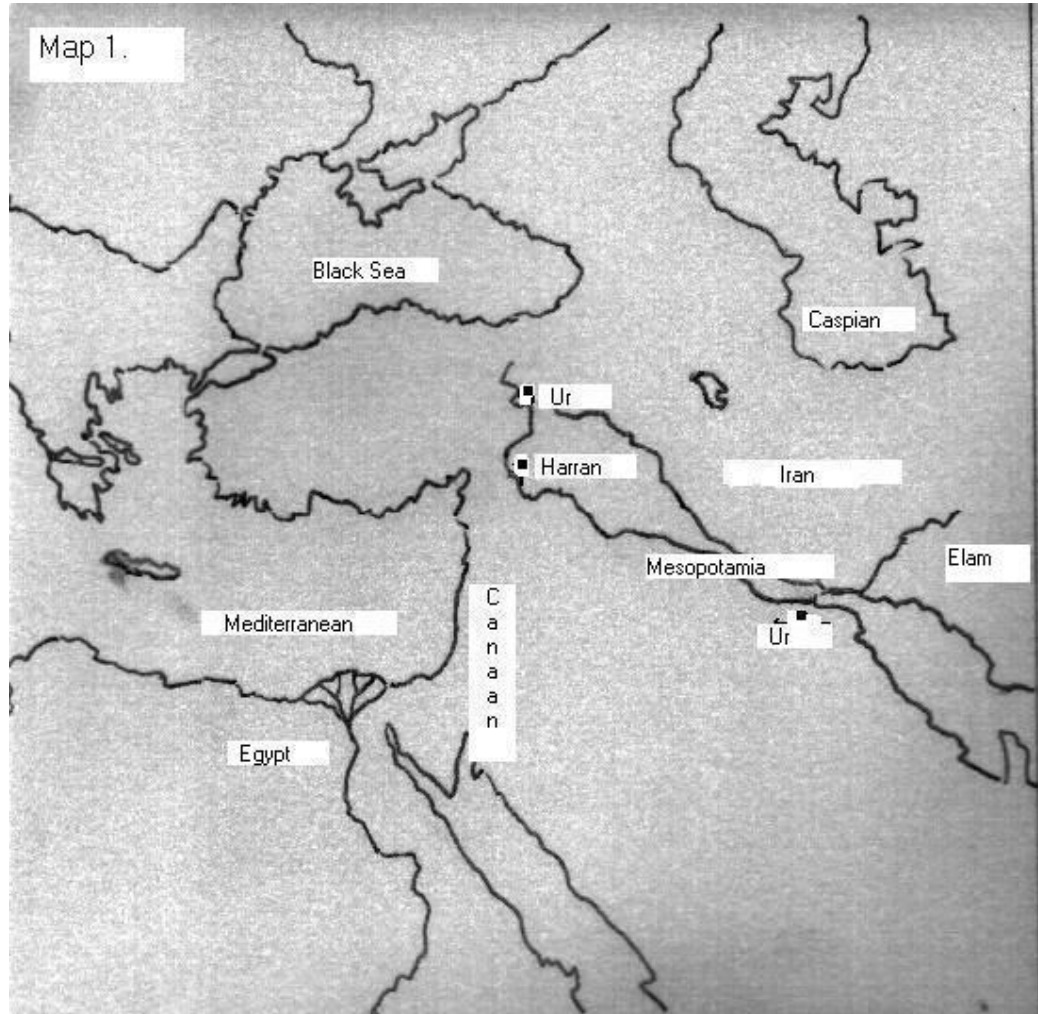
Most of those who doubt the existence of Israel before the end of the Bronze Age partly base their judgment on the lack of documentary evidence in Egypt. After all, Egypt was Canaan's neighbor and part of the stories of the Book of Genesis was played out in Egypt. It is true that the Egyptians had monuments, stelae, papyri, etc, and the Egyptians usually recorded their history. However, it is also true that the Egyptians had a habit of selective historical writing. Egyptian documents do not mention Moses and Israel, and the whole story of the Exodus also goes unmentioned, but then the Egyptians never recorded anything that would have put them in negative light. So, it is true that the Egyptians do not mention Israel and the Exodus, but then Egyptian documents do not mention the Hyksos either, and the Hyksos ruled over 150 years in Egypt.

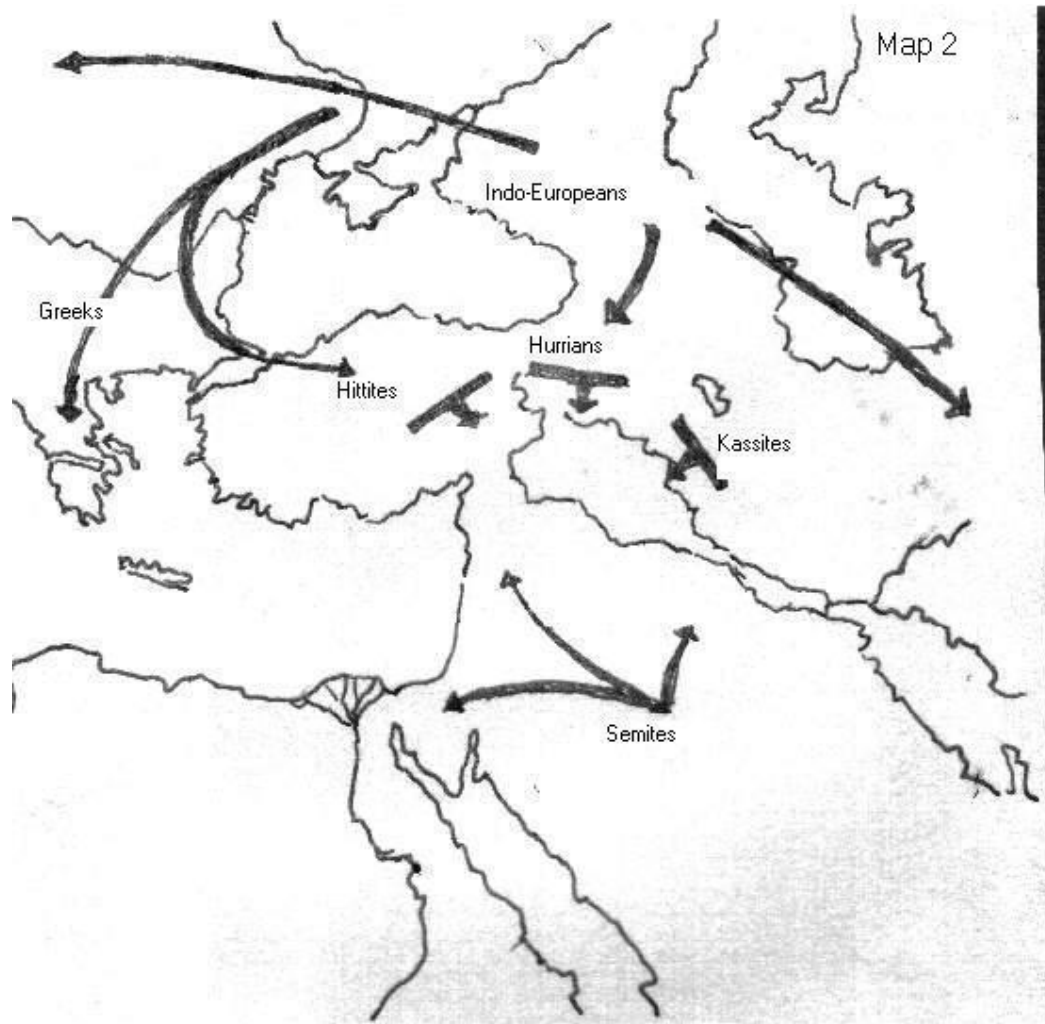
There is unbroken evidence of Israeli existence for the last 3200 years, since the date of the Merneptah Stele, which first mentions Israel by name. It is rather a longer period than any other people on earth; probably only the Chinese can be compared to it. The age of the Patriarchs and the slavery in Egypt would extend it by about 800 years. It would be important but not terribly so.

Judging from the analysis of this book, some time before the end of the Bronze age, a tribal confederation was created somewhere in the highlands of Canaan. Among those who joined the confederacy there were probably some who saw themselves as descendants of Abraham, and others who saw themselves as descendants of Jacob. It is very possible that the descendants of Jacob had memories of a period of slavery in Egypt and of a miraculous escape. There were probably Amorites and Canaanites too who joined the confederacy, just as did the descendants of the original Hittites and Hurrians. There were others, the Shasu of Seir and the tribes of Dan, an Aegean tribe living in Canaan, near the Philistines. According to the monument of Ramses III, both the Philistines and the Danoniu (Dan) were part of the Peoples of the Sea.

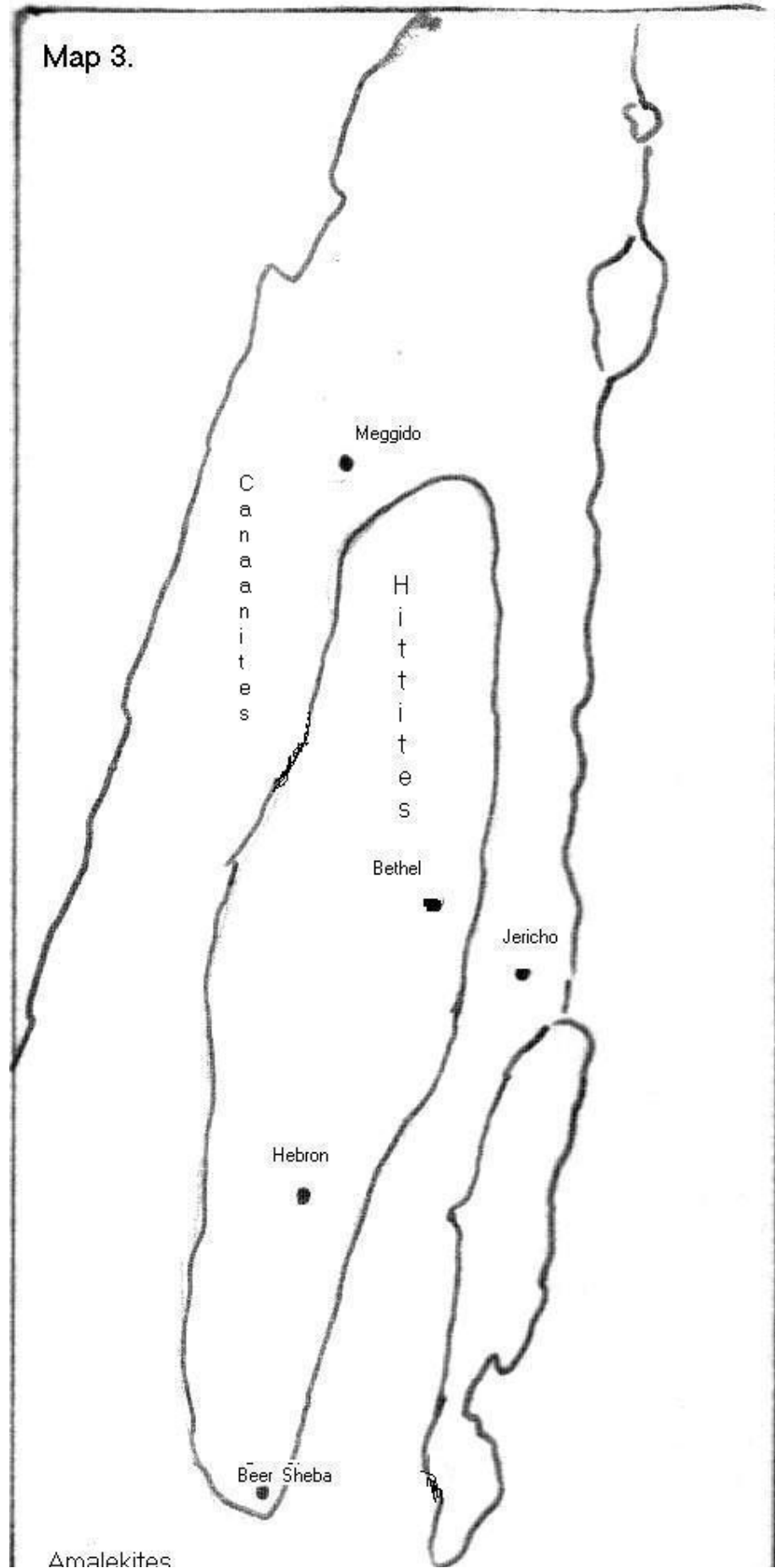
Judging from later history of Israel, at the time of the Monarchy, before the exile and today, those who believed in the reforms assigned to Abraham, worshiped Yahweh and had cultural value which they inherited from the Patriarchs, were the dominant factor in the tribal confederacy and shaped its values for the future.

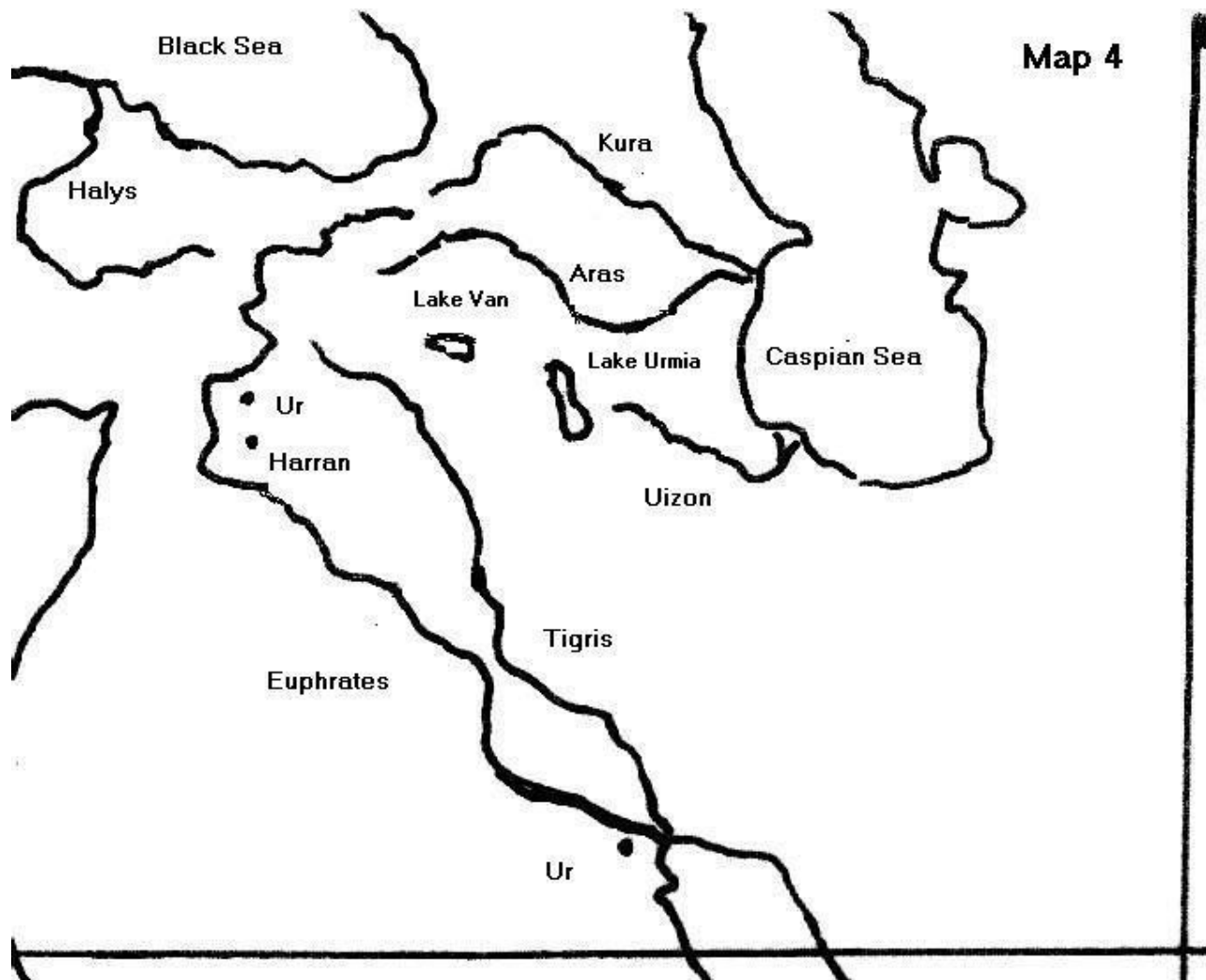
Map 1.





Map 3.





Map 4

